

“A SIMPLE TALE TOLD SIMPLY”: THE CULTURAL IMPORTANCE
OF R.D. BLACKMORE’S NEGLECTED NOVEL *LORNA DOONE*

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in English

by

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Accepted by the faculty of the Caudill College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences,
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Master of Arts in English degree.

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18 September 2014

“A SIMPLE TALE TOLD SIMPLY”: THE CULTURAL IMPORTANCE
OF R.D. BLACKMORE’S NEGLECTED NOVEL *LORNA DOONE*

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R.D. Blackmore’s *Lorna Doone*, first published in 1869, reaffirms values that were rapidly disappearing in an era of tumultuous change. While novelists such as George Eliot and Thomas Hardy were embracing scientific rationalism and liberal theology, Blackmore viewed new social and philosophical movements with suspicion, staking his worldview on the validity of traditional Christianity, education in the classics, and the British Empire against what he saw as the onslaught of the Darwinists, the social reformers, the anti-imperialists, and other voices of heterodoxy. In the years after its publication, *Lorna Doone* drew praise from noted contemporaries such as Gerard Manley Hopkins, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Thomas Hardy. Readers often expressed pleasure in Blackmore’s images of nature, seeing in his old-fashioned romance an antidote to the cares and distractions of modern life. The popularity of *Lorna Doone* lasted well into the twentieth century, but the novel has attracted little scholarly interest in recent years, perhaps in part because Blackmore’s religious and social views are largely considered out of date. In losing sight of *Lorna Doone* and its author, readers and scholars may risk losing a balanced perspective on the Victorian era by focusing on writers whose beliefs are much closer to the norm in the twenty-first century than is Blackmore’s conservatism.

In order to demonstrate that there is still a place for *Lorna Doone* in classrooms, the arguments in this study have been divided into four chapters. The first traces the popular and critical fate of Blackmore's novel in its early years up through the latter half the twentieth century. The second continues these threads while examining *Lorna Doone* side-by-side with George Eliot's *Adam Bede*; the similarities and profound differences between the two works help illuminate *Lorna Doone*'s place in the Victorian literary canon, showing the importance of heeding voices on both ends of the ideological spectrum. The third chapter sets *Lorna Doone* next to Hardy's more widely-known *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. Hardy, whose path took him well away from religious orthodoxy, is a compelling contrast with Blackmore the man of faith, and yet the mutual admiration the two writers shared suggests that *Lorna Doone* reaches across barriers, articulating profound insights into the human condition and presenting a picture of Englishness compelling enough to overcome objections to Blackmore's worldview. The fourth chapter closely considers Blackmore's use of the historical romanticism popularized by Walter Scott half a century before and the thematic importance of Blackmore's literary allusions.

Accepted by: Glen Colburn, Chair

Layne Neeper

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family, especially my mother, my father, and my sister. Without the early love of reading my parents instilled in me, I doubt this project would ever have existed. I love you all, and by the way, it's about time we went out for coffee and a book-buying spree again. After all, it's been a whole day since we emptied our wallets to fill up our bookshelves. What are we waiting for?

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It's an honor and a pleasure to sit and listen in the midst of such a community of readers and scholars who share a love of the same authors.

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1. “Life and Memory”: A History of *Lorna Doone* in Literary and Popular Culture

R.D. Blackmore’s 1869 novel *Lorna Doone* is a fine case study in how a work that once enjoyed immense popular and critical success can slip into near oblivion. The passion *Lorna Doone* inspired in its readers from the early years of its publication until well into the twentieth century is as heartfelt—if not as widespread—as anything seen in response to more contemporary British writers such as J.K. Rowling. Margaret Oliphant, in her 1871 review of *Lorna Doone* for *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, dubbed it “a book far above the standard of the ordinary novel . . . full of the truest nature and beautiful thoughts” (47). However, the dearth of scholarly commentary on *Lorna Doone* over the past several decades is a sign that the novel has fallen into a critical abyss. Various historical and cultural factors have affected the visibility of *Lorna Doone* over the years, and yet it is a novel that deserves greater attention from readers and from scholars of the Victorian era. In allowing *Lorna Doone* to fade from our picture of the nineteenth-century literary scene, we have lost a powerful voice for conservative Victorian values that balances the voices of more liberal writers such as George Eliot and Thomas Hardy and gives us a more complete and accurate view of the wide spectrum of Victorian beliefs.¹

The problem with prevailing perspectives on the Victorian era is illustrated by a passage from John Fowles’s 1969 novel *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, which begins its narrative in March 1867. Charles Smithson, the protagonist, is exploring the countryside in full scientific regalia when the narrator remarks on the cultural context Charles is living in:

It was men not unlike Charles . . . who laid the foundations of all our modern science . . . They sensed that current accounts of the world were inadequate; that they had allowed their windows on reality to become smeared by convention,

¹ See chapter two for a discussion of *Lorna Doone* in relationship to Eliot’s *Adam Bede* and chapter three for a discussion of its relationship to Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*.

religion, social stagnation; they knew, in short, that they had things to discover, and that the discovery was of the utmost importance to the future of man. (47)

Such wording suggests that the overriding impulse of the Victorian era was progress, especially scientific progress. To hold to the certainties of the past was to place oneself on the wrong side of history. “Convention” and “stagnation” were the enemies of progress. The tacit assumption here is that in order for “the future of man” to be a positive one, what is “outdated” must make way for what is new and supposedly more true than what it is replacing. In elevating “modern science” and the Victorian men and women who spearheaded that science, Fowles’s narrator is, by implication, dismissing Victorians who rejected such scientific progress and felt that the old model of the world was in fact the better one.

This perspective, as articulated in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, is not isolated; it is simply one of the more colorful expressions of a widespread attitude reflected even in recent scholarship on the Victorian era. In his book-length study, *The Victorians*, A.N. Wilson is not shy about dismissing skeptics of modern scientific theory: “All but crackpots now in the twenty-first century accept that these early to mid-nineteenth-century geologists were, if not precisely accurate in their conclusions, broadly speaking right. Independent scientific inquiry had taken the place of a blindly erroneous reading of Scripture, as the criterion for determining truth” (100). Among the examples Wilson cites of opposition to Victorian scientific developments is the tragic figure of Rear Admiral Robert Fitzroy, who had piloted the *Beagle* for Darwin during its voyage to the Galapagos Archipelago. Fitzroy was a committed creationist who objected to Darwin’s theories and eventually committed suicide. Wilson comments on the suicide with the following: “Beneath the rear admiral’s expressions of religious certitudes lay terror. We can never forget this when observing the phenomenon now generally termed ‘fundamentalism,’ which is why it

so often turns to violence” (229). The implication behind this sweeping statement appears to be that “religious certitudes” are incompatible with modern science, and any person—Victorian or otherwise—who questions the assumptions of modern science is a fool at best and quite possibly a danger to society.

Science is not the only field in which Victorian conservatism has come under fire. In a recent article on Victorian hymnody, Mike Sanders takes a hard line against what he sees as the “smug conservatism” of the well-known 1848 hymn “All Things Bright and Beautiful” and the “cultural-imperialist sentiments” of “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains.” Sanders elaborates on the consensus about such hymns and the context in which they were written: “Victorian hymns are often seen as exemplifying the ills of nineteenth-century culture. Politically, aesthetically, and even theologically offensive to many scholars, the Victorian hymn currently languishes in an obscurity that many consider well deserved” (679). This negative view of Victorian hymnody—or more precisely, of the conservatism that often lay behind it—limits what can be gained from a close reading of the Victorian era’s conservative texts, whether in the realm of hymnody, poetry, novels, or otherwise. *Lorna Doone*, written by a man who made no secret of his disgust with modern science and technology, proudly proclaiming his support of the Empire and his belief in the superiority of English culture, is in some ways a symbol of what Sanders and his colleagues seem to find detestable about the conservative impulse within Victorian culture.

Scholars have also questioned the connotations of the label “Victorian.” Kate Flint’s explanation suggests that many scholars dislike the term because of the conservatism it implies:

At a visceral level, I’m suspicious of the period fetishism it can connote . . . I share . . . the view that it poses significant limitations when it comes to discussing the dynamics of transnational cultures, whether we are thinking about

transatlantic relations, about the operations of empire, or about the increasingly global exchange in ideas as well as in economic capital. The very term “Victorian” carries with it an unmistakable national, and nationalist, overtone. (230)

That R.D. Blackmore has been referred to by more than one commentator as “The Last Victorian” is no idle point in this debate. Kenneth Budd chose this name as the title for his biography of Blackmore. Blackmore was a proud conservative in politics, religion, and various social issues, and if scholars such as Wilson, Sanders, and Flint are wary of close-mindedness and narrowness of focus, Blackmore fits the mold for a classic Victorian conservative and traditionalist.

C.S. Lewis uses the term “chronological snobbery” to refer to “the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited” (207). Likewise, Peter Kreeft sees as problematic the “typically modern use of that very word ‘modern’ to carry a (positive) value judgment” (40). In the passage from Fowles, we have a summation of a common perspective on the Victorians that focuses on what is progressive or “modern” at the expense of what is conservative or traditional. In his chapter on Thomas Hardy in *The English Novel: An Introduction*, Terry Eagleton casually refers to Hardy’s age as “Darwinist,” a label that invites the reader to think of such an age primarily in terms of the Darwinist worldview and its effect on Victorian life and thought (199). James Russell Perkin, in his *Theology and the Victorian Novel*, helps to explain the potential dangers of overusing such labels as these. Though the context of his argument is Victorian religion, many other areas of Victorian life and thought come into play in his book, including politics, religion, sociology, and science:

My only reservation about much recent and excellent commentary on Victorian religion is that it often seems grounded primarily in the concerns of the present, so

that it reads the Victorian texts very selectively, looking for those elements that prefigure the concerns of postmodernity. I would not deny that the study of the past inevitably is shaped by the concerns of the present; in fact, I agree that one of the reasons why we study the past is to understand ourselves better. But we also study the past to gain new perspectives, and to escape from the confines of our own ideological paradigms, and I am concerned that literary and cultural studies do not always sufficiently attend to the otherness of Victorian culture. (8)

Lorna Doone invites us to think not in terms of what is groundbreaking or modern about the Victorians, but in terms of the classical, more orthodox strain in Victorian thought, which is sometimes missed in the scramble to analyze and affirm the ways in which the Victorians embraced various forms of change or liberalism. Over the four chapters of this study, as I examine Blackmore's Anglican background, his roots in the classical traditions of Greece and Rome, and his relationship to his predecessors, his contemporaries, and his successors, the wisdom of restoring his voice to the mix will become clear. *Lorna Doone* is an entertaining romance that does for England's Exmoor district what Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* did for the Highlands,² but beneath its colorful narrative and optimistic ending lies a firm rejection of the philosophical and sociological changes sweeping England at the time of its publication.

The primary purpose of this chapter is to present an overall picture of R.D. Blackmore's life and work, including the sources and publication history of *Lorna Doone* and a summary of the available criticism, which is relatively limited. Since Blackmore has long been neglected by the academic community, a concise biographical sketch will help clarify the context in which all of his writings were produced. The most complete source of biographical information is Waldo

² See chapter four for a brief exploration of how *Lorna Doone* follows the techniques of *Waverley* in its romantic depiction of historical events and real-life locales.

Henry Dunn's *R.D. Blackmore: The Author of Lorna Doone*, published in 1956. Dunn's sources are well-documented and consist of a variety of Blackmore's personal correspondence, as well as information from previous accounts and Dunn's firsthand research. Kenneth Budd's 1960 book *The Last Victorian*, though shorter and not as well-documented, contains a handful of anecdotes that illuminate certain aspects of Blackmore's character and beliefs—especially his relationship to Thomas Hardy. The most recent book-length study of Blackmore is Max Keith Sutton's 1979 *R.D. Blackmore*, which is more of a literary study than a biography, though biography plays a key part in Sutton's text. Once I have touched on the outlines of Blackmore's life and work, I will fill in the details by explaining how *Lorna Doone* came about, how its reputation has fared since its initial publication and why it has fallen into disfavor, and how restoring the novel to a prominent place in the canon will make our picture of the Victorian era more complete. These threads will carry over into the remaining chapters.

Richard Doddridge Blackmore was born at Longworth, Berkshire, on June 7, 1825, to John Blackmore, the Rector of Longworth parish. Within the next few months, his mother, his aunt, and most of the family servants fell to a typhus outbreak (Dunn 23-24).³ In August 1837, when Blackmore was old enough for boarding school, he attended Blundell's School at Tiverton (Budd 17). At Blundell's, he continued a classical education that had begun some years earlier, becoming familiar with Greek and Latin and intimately acquainting himself with such writers as Virgil, Homer, Milton, Shakespeare, and Tennyson (Sutton 17).⁴

In 1853, Blackmore covertly married Lucy Maguire, an Irish-Catholic—a bold step for the son of an Anglican minister (Dunn 76-77). Most of the thirty-four years of their marriage

³ Since I have culled this biographical information from multiple sources, it should be noted that statements about Blackmore's life are validated by the source cited at the end of the sentence or passage in question.

⁴ See chapter four for an in-depth consideration of Blackmore's literary allusions and the central importance of a classical education to his worldview. Blackmore's choices in this area help to distinguish him from writers such as Eliot and Hardy who are currently more prominent in the scholarly community.

were spent at Gomer House, a modest dwelling in the middle of a sixteen-acre plot in Middlesex County that Blackmore had purchased with an inheritance received on the passing of his uncle, Henry Hey Knight. With the law—his original career choice—out of reach for a man of his weak physical constitution, Blackmore opted to become a fruit farmer, which was his primary occupation until his death (85). One might be tempted to assume that the proceeds from fruit farming supported Blackmore’s writing, but the opposite was much closer to the truth. Less than a decade before his passing, he claimed, “In the forty years of my experience only twice have I made both ends meet [as a fruit farmer]” (qtd. in Dunn 105).

Blackmore’s career as a writer was marked by continual disappointment in the failure of his other works to enjoy the same success and recognition as *Lorna Doone*. The few significant biographical treatments are unanimous in admitting that his popular fame has rested primarily on one novel—and even *Lorna Doone* has “failed to attract much serious critical attention in recent years,” as Sally Shuttleworth points out for her introduction to the 1989 World’s Classics text of the novel, and little has changed in the years since that introduction was written (ix). Though the World’s Classics text has been revised and reissued a number of times, and there are still a few notable editions of the novel in print, *Lorna Doone*’s early success and the passionate devotion it once earned from readers across the spectrum has given way to popular and critical silence.

Lorna Doone was Blackmore’s eighth published work. Three books of poetry were published in the 1850s. His next two publications were also poetry; one of these, *The Farm and Fruit of Old*, was a translation of the first two of Virgil’s *Georgics*, poems focusing on the works of nature—not a surprising choice given Blackmore’s dual interest in Latin poetry and gardening. His first novel was *Clara Vaughan*, a prototypical mystery novel that Sutton has compared with the “sensation novels” popularized by Wilkie Collins and Elizabeth Braddon around the time

Clara Vaughan was released in 1864 (38). The reviews of *Clara Vaughan* were not all that encouraging; while one critic called it “unmistakably a work of original genius,” other comments were far less flattering (Sutton 39-40). Since my intent is to focus on *Lorna Doone*, Blackmore’s first novel is notable mainly for one of its key secondary characters: the Devonshire farmer Jan Huxtable, whose similarities to John Ridd, the far more well-known protagonist of *Lorna Doone*, are striking (Sutton 40-41).

Blackmore’s second novel, *Cradock Nowell*, is also his first “regional” novel. Most of his novels have subtitles that advertise the particular English locality in which the majority of the plot takes place. *Cradock Nowell: A Tale of the New Forest* may have begun the long string of regional novels Blackmore would produce throughout his career, but it was not until his next and most famous novel was published that the sense of place would reach fruition in his work. W.J. Keith feels that “[*Cradock Nowell*] contains a strong sense of forest-country in general, yet specific references to the New Forest itself are confined once again to the peppering of the text with real place-names . . . Blackmore’s regionalism is not yet firmly based” (70-71). The “New Forest,” in other words, could have been any old forest as far as Keith is concerned, as there is not enough to make the location feel unique. That lack of uniqueness would change profoundly with Blackmore’s third novel.⁵

Since much of *Lorna Doone*’s plot will be discussed in detail in the following chapters, only the briefest of summaries is needed here. The story is set during the Restoration and is written in first-person from the perspective of John Ridd, a yeoman farmer, who is looking back on the events of the narrative many years later. The Doones are a band of outlaws living in a secluded valley in the Exmoor district. Shortly after John introduces himself and describes his

⁵ Keith does not use the term “regional novel” as a pejorative. Rather, it is used in this case to denote a novel with a specific geographical setting depicted by the author in such a way that it could not easily be mistaken for another locale.

education, we learn that his father was killed by the Doones for interfering with one of their raids. Years later, John is fishing near Doone territory and is knocked unconscious when he slips in the water. A girl who calls herself Lorna Doone finds him and nurses him until he wakes. Seven years after his first encounter with Lorna, John returns to the area with his uncle and again meets Lorna Doone, who has grown into a beautiful—and still innocent—woman. Though pained by the notion of falling in love with a member of the family that murdered his father, John justifies his choice by emphasizing Lorna's blamelessness in the matter of his father's death.⁶

It is eventually discovered that the Doones kidnapped Lorna as a child because of their dispute with her family. It was their intent to force her to marry one of their number so that they might legally regain their land and status, the loss of which drove them to become outlaws in the first place. Lorna's newfound status as heiress to one of the greatest fortunes in England creates a whole new barrier in her relationship with John the farmer. John finally manages to overcome this barrier when an act of bravery earns him the knighthood that enables him to marry a person of Lorna's status. Carver Doone, John's chief nemesis and would-be rival for Lorna's affections, shoots Lorna in the middle of the wedding and flees, leading to a showdown in the Wizard's Slough, a local swamp that merits an elaborate origin story from Blackmore. Carver drowns in the swamp, and John returns home to recover from his own injuries while watching Lorna pull through her near-death experience.

As I will demonstrate shortly, many Victorian and twentieth-century readers embraced *Lorna Doone* in spite of—perhaps even because of—its melodramatic overtones.⁷ Not all readers have been so congenial, however. Ernest Baker, in his 1932 review of Quincy Guy Burris's

⁶ See chapter four for a discussion of the novel's parallels with *Romeo and Juliet* and its position in the field of Victorian attitudes to Shakespeare in general—an important facet of the novel's historical and cultural significance.

⁷ Blackmore's melodramatic romanticism works as an antidote to the despair and skepticism many felt upon the advent of Darwinism and the many challenges to Christian orthodoxy. See chapters three and four for more on this theme.

thesis on Blackmore, dismissed *Lorna Doone* as little more than schlock: “[Blackmore’s] literary work, in spite of its genuine merits, has little historical importance, originating nothing and influencing no one . . . Even *Lorna Doone* hardly stands re-reading. In the long outline here given [by Burris], the famous story sounds so ultra-romantic, so jejune, and even childish, that we are disillusioned” (240). In the closing paragraph of his review, Baker suggests that the next scholar to treat Blackmore will be better off focusing on Blackmore’s fruit growing rather than his writing. This dismissive tone from Baker suggests that one possible reason for the scholarly community’s long neglect of *Lorna Doone* is that some refuse to see past the bare outlines of the romantic plot to understand how the novel addresses Victorian religious and social concerns. I will return to examine this line between the melodrama and the message of *Lorna Doone* in later chapters.

Blackmore was notoriously reluctant to discuss how *Lorna Doone* came about, though that didn’t stop readers from both sides of the Atlantic from trying to tickle the story out of him. What we know comes mainly from Blackmore’s own preface to the novel and from a handful of personal letters that have been recovered. In the preface to the first edition of *Lorna Doone* from March 1869, Blackmore reveals that the inspiration for the novel is a legend or series of legends native to the Exmoor district of England—hence the novel’s full title, *Lorna Doone: A Romance of Exmoor*: “Any son of Exmoor, chancing on this volume, cannot fail to bring to mind the nurse-tales of his childhood—the savage deeds of the outlaw Doones in the depths of Bagworthy Forest, the beauty of the hapless maid brought up in the midst of them, the plain John Ridd’s Herculean power, and . . . the exploits of Tom Faggus” (3)⁸. Blackmore may have been “brought up on legends of the Doones and accepted the stories as having a factual foundation,” but

⁸ Unless otherwise specified, all quotations from the text of *Lorna Doone* or from one of Blackmore’s prefaces are pulled from the 2008 reprint of the Oxford UP edition, edited by Sally Shuttleworth.

according to a letter he penned to J. Charles Cox, what actually prompted the novel was an eight-part serial printed in *The Leisure Hour* in 1863 titled “The Doones of Exmoor” (Dunn 126).

Dunn points out that several other guidebooks and articles printed in this era allude to the Doone legends and could have provided further literary inspiration, but since the story from *The Leisure Hour* is explicitly mentioned in the author’s letter, I believe it is important to examine this source more closely (126-27).⁹ Doing so reveals that much of the Doones’ menace and the ambience of the Exmoor landscape itself can be traced to earlier sources and solidifies Blackmore’s novel as a romance, with plot points and characterizations inspired more by folklore than the realism prized by other Victorian writers, including Eliot and Hardy.

Surprisingly, very little has been said about “The Doones of Exmoor” in the secondary literature. Dunn refers to the story but never gives a detailed summary. Budd writes that the Blackmores took a “holiday in Devon,” and it was around this time in the middle of the decade that the author came across the magazine serial (51). Malcolm Elwin dismisses the story as “having little to do with the Doones,” yet he also admits that it “so interested [Blackmore] that he spent a holiday in Devon, investigating the details on the scene of the legend” (263-64). That a story “having little to do with the Doones” should have sent Blackmore on a quest to investigate the countryside in which the Doone legends originated is a remarkable anecdote and demands a longer look than Elwin gave it. As far as I have been able to determine, no scholar has treated “The Doones of Exmoor” in any depth.

Elwin’s assertion that “The Doones of Exmoor” has little to do with the Doones is not, strictly speaking, true. While the climax of the story revolves around Jennified de Wichehalse

⁹ The source for Dunn’s assertion that “The Doones of Exmoor” prompted Blackmore’s novel is an editorial from *The Athenaeum*. J. Charles Cox, the author of the editorial, claims that his oral tales of the Doones inspired a roommate at school to pen the story published in *The Leisure Hour*. Cox also claimed to have a letter from R.D. Blackmore admitting that the story “gave him the clue for the weaving of the romance, and caused him to study the details on the spot” (Cox 274).

and the discovery of her body at the bottom of a cliff, the outlaw tribe plays a part in several key scenes and is blamed by the author for the story's tragic outcome: "And now there is nothing left but his [Sir Edward de Wichehalse's] monument and shield in Lynton Church, to make known the existence of a family whose extinction may be traced . . . to that lawless, desperate band, the Doones of Exmoor" (675).¹⁰ Surely it is worth noting the parallel here with the final lines of *Lorna Doone*: "And if I [John Ridd, the narrator] wish to pay her [Lorna] out for something very dreadful—as may happen once or twice, when we become too gladsome—I bring her to forgotten sadness, and to me for cure of it, by the two words 'Lorna Doone'" (663, ch. LXXV). The short story ends with Jennifried's tragic death, and the novel ends with Lorna's marriage to John, so at first glance the two endings may appear to be very different. However, the final word or phrase in both accounts is "Doones of Exmoor" or "Doone." In the case of the short story, we are left with a reminder of who has caused the extinction of an entire family line, and in the case of the novel, the "Doone" in *Lorna Doone* is a constant memento of the destiny she was rescued from. So both endings contain a touch of melancholy and romanticism in their reminder of the Doone name and everything it represents.

This is not the only parallel between *Lorna Doone* and "The Doones of Exmoor." It is not even the most significant parallel, necessarily. In the first few paragraphs of the short story, as we are introduced to two horsemen who are destined to interrupt the kidnapping of two young women by a pair of Doones, one horseman explains to the other the origins of a swamp they are passing, known by the locals as "Mole's Chamber": "One of our north country farmers . . . lies buried just here to the right. He disappeared from his brother huntsmen, as the tale goes, in an instant, and I believe the bog is deep enough to hold a good half dozen on the top of each other,

¹⁰ Direct quotations from "The Doones of Exmoor" are taken from an anthology of *The Leisure Hour* that includes all of the issues in which the story originally appeared. No author or publisher is named in the volume, only the city of publication.

without trace or sign that they had ever been. His name was Mole, and the bog is called Mole's Chamber to this day" (562). As much as this small scenic detail lends character to the story's Exmoor landscape, it pales in comparison with the deadly Wizard's Slough in *Lorna Doone*, for which Blackmore concocts a fanciful origin story, part miracle play and part fable. We are told that, in "ancient times," a necromancer plagued Exmoor by slaughtering wildlife—and even the occasional traveler—from his "strong high palace, eight-sided like a spider's web" (503, ch. LVIII). His witchcraft allowed him to attack from a distance, so that no one could get near enough to touch him. Finally, a clever Christian pilgrim came along and slew the wizard by persuading him to admit that the only person he had ever done a good deed for was himself. As soon as the wizard revealed the depth of his selfishness, he and his palace were swallowed up by the earth until "over them was nothing left, except a black bog fringed with reed of the tint of the wizard's whiskers" (506, ch. LVIII). This is the same bog that Carver Doone drowns in during his final struggle with John Ridd; just as the ancient necromancer who stole from the people of Exmoor fell a victim of his own selfishness, so Carver the representative of the Doones of Exmoor drowns in the symbol of the same selfishness embraced by his family. While the swamp in "The Doones of Exmoor" is not a significant part of the story's plot, nor does it have the same moral symbolism Blackmore gives to his Wizard's Slough, both swamps have names with vivid stories behind them, stories passed on through local rumor and superstition. Even if it could be proved that Blackmore had the idea for the Wizard's Slough long before he read the story from *The Leisure Hour*, perhaps from his own knowledge of English topography and hearsay, "Mole's Chamber" can only have reinforced the idea that would blossom in his own work.

Another parallel between "The Doones of Exmoor" and *Lorna Doone* that is worth considering is the description of the Doones themselves. Outwardly, the Doones are said to have

a respectable appearance thanks to their efforts in legitimate forms of trade such as “furze, wood, and peat” (595). The story goes on in less flattering terms: “It was well-known, however, that there were amongst them a number of broken-down outlaws—some of them of good birth, but whose habits had unfitted them for respectable society, and hardened them to the committal of crime; and as a gang of freebooters, they were the terror of the country” (595). The key point here is that the short story paints some of the Doones as highborn men who have turned to criminal deeds for whatever reason. In the short story, we do not learn the reasons why the Doones chose such a lifestyle, with the exception of a Doone named Ferguson who blames his life of crime on the man who ruined his courtship: “I am what I am through you . . . Like a snake you crept into the garden of my hopes, and vilified a man as good as yourself. Refused the redress I sought, I went I cared not whither, and now I am a Doone” (578). As with his elaborate explanation of the Wizard’s Slough, Blackmore goes much further than the author of the short story in his attempt to help readers understand the Doones’ nature and motives. In Chapter V of *Lorna Doone*, Blackmore’s narrator informs us that Sir Ensor Doone, who is at this point in the story the head of the Doone family, lost his holdings during the political and social upheavals of the 1640s through a legally sanctioned maneuver by his cousin Lord Lorne (41-42). Late in the story, we learn that Lorna is the last surviving member of the Lorne household and that it is only through marriage with Lorna that the Doones can regain the land they lost (488-89, ch. LVII).

The termination of the Doones’ threat to the people of Exmoor comes about in similar fashion in both “The Doones of Exmoor” and *Lorna Doone*. In the former, when a Doone raid ends in the killing of a child, the people finally decide that they have had enough (579). A raid is planned on the Doone stronghold and successfully executed at night with minimal damage to the attacking force. Most of the Doones are captured or killed (610-11). In *Lorna Doone*, the initial

raid on the Doones fails, largely because the attacking force is made up of men from the counties of Somerset and Devon, and their rivalry is so fierce that the battle ends with them fighting each other instead of the Doones (464-65, ch. LIV). A second, more successful assault on the Doones takes place after the Battle of Sedgemoor; as in “The Doones of Exmoor,” the assault takes place at night, “because the moon would be at the full” (626, ch. LXXI).

How much Blackmore owed to “The Doones of Exmoor” and how much was inspired by other accounts of the Doones is impossible to pinpoint. Since Blackmore and his biographers indicate that he grew up on legends of the Doones, it is probable that at least some of the details in the novel came from oral and written sources he had encountered long before his exposure to the story in *The Leisure Hour*. However, we know from Blackmore’s testimony that he read the short story, and as I have just shown, the short story contains parallels with *Lorna Doone* that are hard to ignore.

Unfortunately for Blackmore, the popularity of the Doone legends did not immediately translate into high sales of his novel, as *Lorna Doone* was all but ignored upon its initial publication. The first printing of 500 copies in the three-decker format failed to sell out; of these, some 200 copies were “exported,” meaning they were “deemed unsaleable” (Dunn 130). The second printing was an entirely different matter. In October 1870, the very same month that the one-volume edition of *Lorna Doone* was published, Princess Louise became engaged to the Marquis of Lorne, a man “not of the royal family” (Dunn 132). A contemporary book review claimed that Blackmore had written his novel as a chronicle of Lorne’s ancestors; this, combined with the similarity between the real-life love story and its fictional counterpart—both involving a member of a highborn family marrying into the lower classes—was enough to pique the public’s interest, and *Lorna Doone* was suddenly the book of the moment (Dunn 131).

Lest it begin to seem as if Blackmore simply had the right story at the right time, once *Lorna Doone* had caught on, compliments on the literary merits of his novel began trickling in from all quarters, including some of the most well-known literary figures of the century. Gerard Manley Hopkins “compared Blackmore’s writing with Elizabethan drama, and praised his Shakespearean word-painting,” Edith Wharton “placed a bound copy in her library,” and Robert Louis Stevenson “wrote him letters of gratitude from Samoa” (Knights vi; Sutton 25). Sutton adds the names of several other distinguished admirers to this list: “the Pre-Raphaelite painter Ford Madox Brown . . . the veteran novelists Margaret Oliphant and William Black, the young novelists Eden Phillpotts, Hall Caine, and James Baker, and the distinguished paleontologist Sir Richard Owen” (Sutton 25). Thomas Hardy’s response was perhaps the most flattering, given how important nature was to Blackmore in his life and work: “Little phases of nature which I thought nobody had noticed but myself were continually turning up in your book—for instance, the marking of a heap of sand into little pits by the droppings from trees was a fact I should unhesitatingly have declared unknown to any other novelist till now” (qtd. in Knights xxiii). Hardy declared it was “almost absurd” that he had failed to read *Lorna Doone* much sooner, as the novel had been published in 1869, and Hardy’s reading of it came about in 1875 (Knights vi). That same year, after their initial correspondence, Hardy paid Blackmore a visit at his fruit farm, and a lively conversation ensued, about which Budd has written a fascinating account that highlights both the similarities and the differences between the two writers (72-74).

As fascinating as the response of Blackmore’s literary peers might be, the response of average readers to *Lorna Doone* is indicative of a wider resonance: “Although its early financial returns disappointed its author, a print-run of one hundred thousand six-penny copies sold out within a week in 1897” (Knights xi). In 1896, some few years before Blackmore’s death,

William Phelps of Yale asked the students in his Modern Novels class to write papers on *Lorna Doone*, and the instructor sent the entire set of papers to Blackmore (Dunn 142). Exactly ten years later, “male students at Yale voted *Lorna Doone* their favorite novel” (Shuttleworth ix). Sutton affirms the “mythic appeal” of *Lorna Doone* to a generation of readers: “For pilgrims to Doone-land, the heroine, the outlaws, and the stalwart farmer are still presences on Exmoor . . . All the concern with finding the true Doone Valley, the waterslide, and the site of Plover’s Barrows is a sign of the characters’ life within the imagination” (49). For decades after the novel’s publication—and well into the twentieth century—arguments raged about the settings in the novel and which real-life sites were believed to have inspired Blackmore in each case. In 1969, on the centenary of the novel’s publication, an especially polemical voice—Sir Atholl Oakeley, whose booklet detailing the “facts” Blackmore supposedly based his characters and events on is an important part of the secondary literature—would demand that the Ordnance Survey mapmakers change the “official” location of the Doone Valley to the site he believed was the “true” one (Sutton 49).

The popularity of *Lorna Doone*, especially in England and America, turned Blackmore himself into something of a celebrity, a situation that was both a blessing and a curse.¹¹ Through their enthusiasm for his work, Blackmore made several good friends from America, more than one of whom traveled to England to visit him in person (Dunn 190-206). On an even more personal level, the name Lorna suddenly became a “popular new name for girls” after the publication of *Lorna Doone*. Robert Louis Stevenson sent Blackmore tidings of one such young

¹¹ English literature is replete with examples of authors who once enjoyed celebrity but have now faded into near obscurity. By the same token, authors who were once derided by the scholarly community for catering to popular taste or using “hack” techniques have sometimes enjoyed a revival of interest from that same community. Gothic writer Ann Radcliffe, kept alive in the pages of Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*, is a fair example. Yael Shapira’s “Where the Bodies Are Hidden: Ann Radcliffe’s ‘Delicate’ Gothic” and JoEllen DeLucia’s “From the Female Gothic to a Feminist Theory of History: Ann Radcliffe and the Scottish Enlightenment” are just two of the many products of recent Radcliffe scholarship. It is my hope to inspire a similar resurgence of interest in Blackmore and *Lorna Doone*.

woman, a missionary's daughter, whom he had met on one of his journeys to Samoa (Knights xiii). Another Lorna, to whom Blackmore became godfather, was born to his illustrator: "I could get a little roomful of them now," Blackmore wrote in 1892, "all nice girls, according to their photos and parents" (qtd. in Knights xiii). Among the material signs of the novel's popular influence into the twentieth century are "china patterns . . . cross-stitch kits, cigarette cards, a floribunda rose, a lake and park in Orlando, Florida and—recalling Lorna's Scottish ancestry—a Nabisco shortbread cookie" (xiii). The park in Orlando still carries the name to this day (*City of Orlando*, n.p.). The cookies are readily available at grocery stores in the States, and a vintage Nabisco television commercial features echoes of John Ridd, his cousin Tom Faggus, and Tom's strawberry mare Winnie through the company's product jingle:

These Lorna Doones just taste so grand
 That they're number one with this cowhand
 And their rich tempting flavor so good, of course
 That they're also the favorite of this faithful horse. (Gallen)

During World War I, a paddle steamer christened after Blackmore's heroine served as a minesweeper for the Royal Navy, though the ship had been built some years earlier (Colledge and Warlow 235). Her successor, Lorna Doone II, was built in 1916 and served the same function before becoming a "pleasure boat" that was finally scrapped in the 1950s (Knights xiii). In 1948, the American comedy act The Three Stooges released *The Hot Scots*, a short film in which the Stooges pose as Scotch detectives, encountering a woman named Lorna Doone who turns out to be a thief. When Lorna introduces herself, Shemp grins and replies, "Hi, Lorna. How you doin'?" dragging out the syllables in the final word in a pun on Lorna's name. Later, Lorna offers Moe a plate of cookies—presumably shortbread—and dances the Highland fling to

the sound of bagpipes (*The Hot Scots*). The Stooges would remake the short only six years later, this time with a new title, *Scotched in Scotland*, but with Shemp's line intact and scenes that closely match the earlier short (*Scotched in Scotland*). Aside from these passing tributes, *Lorna Doone* has been adapted for the screen a number of times, most recently in 2000 by A&E. This adaptation, in spite of clocking in at nearly three hours, begins immediately with the murder of John Ridd's father and moves along at a fast clip, keeping the outline of the story largely intact (Coyle, Warner, and Gillen). Other notable adaptations include the 1922 silent film with Madge Bellamy as Lorna and John Bowers as John Ridd; when Kino Video re-mastered the film in the early 2000s, the studio thought enough of it to commission a brand new soundtrack by popular Japanese vocalist and composer Mari Iijima (Bellamy and Bowers). 1990 saw a TV adaptation starring Clive Owen, Polly Walker, and Sean Bean as John, Lorna, and Carver, respectively (Owen, Walker, and Bean). Many of the lesser-known screen adaptations have yet to be released on DVD. References to *Lorna Doone* still crop up every so often in contemporary popular culture; for example, in an episode from the second season of the ABC sitcom *Modern Family*, Phil exclaims in one scene, "Sweet Lorna Doone! Nineteen missed calls?" (Spiller). Crimson Romance, an online book club, has recently released *Lorna Doone: The Wild and Wanton Edition* on Kindle. Though it hardly qualifies as a "scholarly" edition of the text, it is at least worth notice for its attempt to bring Blackmore's story into the twenty-first century. Most of the text of this edition is taken from the original novel, which makes for a jarring experience when the reader comes across one of M.J. Porteus's additions or amendments to the original, as in this passage from one of John's early meetings with Lorna: "Hereupon an unbidden hardness sprang within me which I hoped she could not see beneath my hosen" (n.p., ch. XIX). The literary value of altering the original text in this way is debatable at best—even readers who are not

offended by Porteus's grafting of explicit sexual acts onto Blackmore's conservative Victorian text may raise an eyebrow on realizing that most of the text is still Blackmore's—but even lovers of Blackmore's original novel may hope that readers who have never heard of *Lorna Doone* will be led back to the original after being exposed to the “wild and wanton” edition.

What of the secondary literature about *Lorna Doone*? Including the handful of sources I have quoted so far, most of the secondary literature consists of chapters from books that cover broader topics, tourist booklets and short histories of questionable veracity, introductions to the various editions of the text, and a small selection of journal articles. The few book-length treatments of Blackmore include the biography by Waldo Henry Dunn, probably the single most important secondary source, as this is not only our main source of biographical information, but has also been liberally quoted in other Blackmore books and articles since its publication in 1956. I will continue to refer to this source and the shorter studies by Budd and Sutton in the chapters ahead. Two important book chapters are Malcolm Elwin's chapter on Blackmore in *Victorian Wallflowers: A Panoramic Survey of the Popular Literary Periodicals* and W.J. Keith's chapter in *Regions of the Imagination*, a 1988 survey of British rural fiction.

In 1906, just six years after Blackmore's death, London publisher A & C Black released F.J. Snell's *The Blackmore Country* as part of the appropriately-titled “The Pilgrimage Series.” Part biography, part history, and part travel narrative, *The Blackmore Country* explores the real-life locales that inspired *Lorna Doone* and comments on some of the debates surrounding the topography of Blackmore's novels. There are many booklets professing to explain the history behind *Lorna Doone* to Exmoor tourists. Among these is Sir Atholl Oakeley's *The Facts on Which Blackmore Based Lorna Doone*, a booklet that went through some ten editions and has sold, according to the cover of the tenth edition, more than 55,000 copies. Oakeley claimed to

have spent sixty years researching the “history” behind Blackmore’s novel. The booklet’s text is oddly formatted, switching between fonts and font sizes with little rhyme or reason and often using capital letters. There are several pages of photos purporting to show such locations as the “Oare church where Carver Doone shot Lorna,” “the Doone Valley remains of Carver’s house,” and some of the “actual” farm buildings of Plover’s Barrows, the farm once belonging to John Ridd and his family (n.p.). The tone of the booklet is adamant throughout, with an almost religious conviction of the historical accuracy of its claims. Somewhat less polemical but still convinced of the historical truth of much of the narrative of *Lorna Doone* is L.B. Thornycroft’s booklet *The Doones in Fact, Fiction, and Picture*. On the plus side, Thornycroft’s booklet is longer and more thorough in its coverage than Oakeley’s, and sources are documented more consistently. Gaps in the historical record and differences between the text of *Lorna Doone* and the reality of the physical locations Blackmore describes are more freely admitted, and there is a helpful list of terms from Blackmore’s text that are defined for modern readers who may not be familiar with them. Obviously, as with any classic work, many older editions of the novel itself have gone out of print and can only be purchased secondhand. The two most readily available editions of the text for scholars and students are the Oxford UP edition and the Wordsworth Classics edition. Both feature helpful scholarly introductions and selected bibliographies for further study—with the latter having been updated in 2004, it is one of the most recent scholarly sources available for Blackmore studies. While recent books and articles on *Lorna Doone* are all but nonexistent, the continuing availability of these two editions of the primary text implies at least some lingering interest from the scholarly community, particularly in the United Kingdom, since both Sally Shuttleworth and Pamela Knights—the editors of the Oxford and Wordsworth editions, respectively—taught at British universities at the time these editions were published.¹²

¹² Shuttleworth taught at the University of Oxford and Knights at the University of Durham (Shuttleworth i; Knights

Why has Blackmore fallen into critical disfavor? Part of the difficulty in setting any literary work firmly in its place is in identifying the work's primary audience, a question further complicated by historical or geographical distance. A work that finds success with a certain audience in its initial years of life on the market, more often than not, will find itself judged by a different standard in generations to come. Peter Merchant's 1987 article "Rehabilitating *Lorna Doone*" ably condenses the problem of categorizing the novel. With the 1984 publication of *Lorna Doone* as a Puffin Classic, "Blackmore's audience was having its age officially revised downwards, by those who create trends as well as observe them" (Merchant 241). Merchant accepts the attempt to relegate Blackmore's novel to the status of a children's classic, arguing that the "evident element of wish fulfillment certainly creates much of the reader's pleasure in the book" (243). The "wish fulfillment" takes several forms, according to Merchant's argument. Childhood insecurities about being separated from the father, for instance, are addressed when Lorna takes the place of John's father and figures such as Tom Faggus play the male role model to John. Blackmore's two lovers meet in childhood, and their example is supposed to make the child feel more comfortable when interacting with the opposite sex in real life. However, since readers are dealing with a male narrator whose attitudes about women are often sexist by modern standards, a plot with a tendency to focus on strength and size, and other allegedly male-centric elements, Merchant narrows Blackmore's audience to "half of a children's classic," believing that its primary audience is children, yes, but more specifically—boys (252).

Just two years after Merchant's article, Shuttleworth would suggest that *Lorna Doone*, "together with *Jane Eyre* . . . constitutes one of the formative texts of adolescent *female* reading" (ix, emphasis added). So both agree that the book is an important childhood classic, but they disagree on whether its primary audience is boys or girls. Moreover, Shuttleworth has a broader

view in her assessment of *Lorna Doone*'s appeal to adults, lamenting its "consignment to relative critical oblivion" (ix). Her explanation for this critical oblivion is contained in the following: "Questions about male self-definition are raised not in the sphere of virile masculine activity, celebrated in so much contemporary male fiction, but rather in the domain of the 'female plot' of romance. Such a threatening crossing of boundaries has probably contributed to [*Lorna Doone*'s] lowly place within the critical canon" (x). Though she acknowledges the "gender demarcations" that lead Merchant to insist that the novel's primary audience is boys, Shuttleworth believes that "their function . . . is to reveal the complex ways in which the construction of personal identity is necessarily negotiated through available cultural stereotypes" (xviii). From this angle, the sexual stereotypes in *Lorna Doone* are seen as an acknowledgement of the problems that both John and Lorna face in navigating their way to individual growth and personal fulfillment through a tangle of contemporary—i.e. Victorian—cultural expectations.

In the years immediately following *Lorna Doone*'s 1869 publication, Blackmore too found himself at odds with cultural expectations. While he was willing, to a certain point, to "keep faith with his popular reputation" by being consistent in elements of plot, setting, and character throughout his career as a novelist, he refused to settle for writing "the same thing over and over again," as many publishers expected from their authors during the period he was active (Elwin 258-59). Elwin concludes, "Blackmore was thus behind his time; a generation earlier, when popular magazines were a medium for introducing an author's original work to a wide circle of readers, the fate of his reputation would have been very different" (259). The subtitle of Dunn's biography summarizes the problem. *R.D. Blackmore: Author of Lorna Doone* is a title that leaves even the uninitiated with the impression that here is an author who has either written one book only or has written only one book that the world cares to remember. The reasons

Elwin offers for the decline of Blackmore's reputation, though not conclusive, are highly suggestive. Blackmore "went on writing steadily, working according to his own standards and trusting vainly that the public might suddenly decide to take him on his merits" (273). He seems to have been reluctant to promote his own work, and thus, "in an age when the reading public had come to be fed upon the gossip paragraphs of the cheap press, his aspirations to popularity were hopelessly handicapped" (273).¹³ Though Elwin asserts that *Lorna Doone* "continues to hold up its head, ranking as a classic of prose fiction," he also argues that "prolixity was Blackmore's besetting sin, apparent even in *Lorna Doone* . . . and noticeably aggravated in his later novels" (274, 279).

As for why *Lorna Doone*—let alone Blackmore's later works—has failed to attract scholarly attention in recent decades, the answer is much more complicated than the argument over the novel's primary audience or potential barriers like length or density of prose. Are there other social, political, and literary factors that have been overlooked? Much of the literary history of the twentieth century is taken up with challenges to the traditional ways of judging and thinking about literature. Feminism, the collapse of the British Empire, Civil Rights, and a host of other historical developments have all had and continue to have a major impact on scholarly discourse. Blackmore is, in some ways, a relic of a bygone age, and it must be acknowledged that some of his personal views, especially his views on race, are highly offensive in today's more diverse literary and social environment. In a letter to Mrs. Paul Hamilton Hayne, the wife of one of his closest American friends, Blackmore made it clear which side he was on in the aftermath of the American Civil War: "I have always thought that justice (as well as valour,

¹³ It was not until years after *Lorna Doone* was published that Lucy Derby, an American friend, became "evidently the first to induce Blackmore to be photographed" (Dunn 191). Blackmore justified his wariness of publicity by exclaiming, "What can be more presumptuous than for any writer, even a great one, to push his own littleness on the large world?" (qtd. in Dunn 192).

chivalry, and heroism) were clearly on the Southern side; and to me it was a very sad time, when the glorious Lee was at last worn out” (qtd. in Dunn 194). In a letter to Mrs. Hayne dated about four months later, he wrote, “I fear that the ‘darkie’ is a great pest to you” (qtd. in Dunn 195). For some, this might be reason enough to dispense with Blackmore entirely. Dunn admits upfront to being “a constant lover of Blackmore and all his work” and passes over these racially-charged remarks with little comment—it is not in our power to determine whether this is because Dunn felt they were a non-issue or simply did not wish to sully Blackmore’s reputation, though given the biography’s 1956 release, just as the modern Civil Rights Movement was catching on in the United States, it seems unlikely Dunn, in his consideration of Blackmore as a whole, would have felt the need to address these views in any detail as today’s scholar would (16).

Amiri Baraka, in his analysis of the link between literary and social trends, recaps one significant development that may in part explain Blackmore’s obscurity: “In the early twentieth century, as whole cities of African-American people moved from the south to north and were transformed from rural dwellers to urban, from farmers to industrial workers, an anti-colonial, anti-imperialist movement came into sharp relief throughout the world, particularly throughout the black world” (151). This of course would lead into the corresponding literary movements that “produced great writers like James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Toomer, and Claude McKay” (152). Interest has grown steadily over the last several decades in turning to overlooked demographics like female and non-native English writers. In this trend lies a profound implication of the differences between the world we live in today and the world Blackmore came from, in which the study of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist works would have been tantamount to treason.

Blackmore “experienced . . . the heavy discipline of school life, as it was administered in those days: the sting of the rod when the rules of Latin and Greek grammar were not glibly repeated and strictly followed, the repression of boyish exuberance, the prohibition of books of fiction . . . and above all, the pushing, the constant urging to get on with the work” (Dunn 61). Life at Peter Blundell’s school in Tiverton involved rules and traditions and expectations that were not to be questioned, let alone altered. A student’s life consisted of the study of acknowledged classical writers such as Homer and Virgil, preferably in their original languages. Obviously, Blackmore did not allow this austere regimen to discourage him from reading and eventually writing fiction, but it would be false to suggest he was not deeply affected by the education he received. It is telling that the work Blackmore considered his highest achievement was not *Lorna Doone* or any of his other novels. Rather, it was “the poem of farming [Virgil’s *Georgics*] which Blackmore translated in what he thought was his best work” (Sutton 24). Even amidst the Devonshire clotted cream, the Exmoor dialect, and other signs of English coloring in *Lorna Doone*, references to classical writers abound.

Blackmore was well aware of the scientific, political, and social developments rocking the larger world, and for the most part they left him feeling deeply uncomfortable: “The times seemed determined to upset him . . . he saw omens of doom in the decline of British agriculture, the talk of Home Rule for Ireland, the Liberal government’s half-hearted support of the empire, the rise of socialism, the challenge of science to the ideal of a classical education, and the growing acceptance of Darwin’s theory of evolution” (Sutton 90). Blackmore was a relic of an era that was rapidly coming to an end, an era of unshakeable faith in God and country and the kind of classical education instilled in him at Blundell’s. Many of his contemporaries were more receptive to new ideas.

Are there any compelling reasons to study *Lorna Doone* in the twenty-first century?

Comparing *Lorna Doone* with other Victorian texts directly reveals both deep similarities and striking differences in worldview and serves as a corrective to common scholarly and popular prejudices about the era, some of which are due to perceptions of “the ills of nineteenth-century culture” (Sanders 679). Chapter two of the present study examines the profound kinship *Lorna Doone* shares with *Adam Bede* in its fond exhibition of rural life, while at the same time showing the critical differences between the worldviews expressed by their respective authors. The third chapter uses *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* to draw out the sharp contrasts between Blackmore and Hardy, two men who ultimately took very different positions in response to the questions that plagued the Victorian intellectual. Finally, in chapter four, I will demonstrate the cohesiveness of Blackmore’s conservative vision by concentrating on his selective use of historical detail and literary allusion. Using Walter Scott’s *Waverley* as a point of comparison, I will show how the historical details in *Lorna Doone* anchor the story in a specific time and place, even as the author leaves himself a great deal of room for romantic license; more importantly, the use of historical figures allows Blackmore to express strong pro-monarchy views that are balanced by a hatred of oppression and political corruption. Blackmore’s use of literary allusion, especially allusions to John Dryden and William Shakespeare, reinforce his conservative political and religious beliefs as they connect with Victorian debates over the authorship of the Bard’s plays and doubts about the divinity of Christ.

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2. “A Wealth of Harvest”: *Lorna Doone*, *Adam Bede*, and the Rural English Community

Where Blackmore stood firmly on political conservatism, theological orthodoxy, and pre-Darwinian narratives of the universe, George Eliot gladly embraced science and secularism—though arguably not in as fully a way as Thomas Hardy. In its emphasis on the rural life and the character of rural people, Eliot’s *Adam Bede* bears a close resemblance to *Lorna Doone*, so close in some respects that many American readers mistook Eliot’s true beliefs and were later upset when they became aware of her secular leanings. *Adam Bede* was published in 1859, exactly ten years before *Lorna Doone* and the same year Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* appeared. In setting their novels within a close-knit rural community, both Blackmore and Eliot frequently lay emphasis on the lives of “ordinary” people with ordinary occupations: carpenters, farmers, clergy, housewives, and the like.

When it comes to characters, the closest parallel between the two novels is arguably in the male lead, since both appear to embody an archetype conveniently defined by the name of Eliot’s protagonist, Adam Bede.¹⁴ In the similarities between these characters, it is easy to see how Eliot’s secularism might have gone unnoticed at first, and in order to treat the views of both writers fairly, it is helpful to begin by acknowledging what Eliot and Blackmore have in common before turning to the differences that put one on the side of philosophical and social progress and the other in the camp of tradition and orthodoxy. As I stated in the first chapter of this study, the powerful similarities and the equally powerful differences between the conservative Blackmore and his more liberal contemporaries are key to appreciating why he belongs in our picture of the

¹⁴ I will not explore this archetype in detail here, but two recent articles for further reading are James Dean’s study of the Middle English “Adam Books,” which fleshed out the Genesis narrative with a kind of “medieval realism,” a picture of Adam and Eve’s life post-Eden that audiences could relate to—much as Eliot aimed for a level of realism few had achieved up to that point (26). Given the highly-charged 1600s political setting of *Lorna Doone*, Katherine Attie’s “Enclosure Polemics and the Garden in the 1650s” also bears some relevance for its explanation of how the Adamic archetype was leveraged by various parties in the controversy over landownership.

Victorian era as a corrective to the temptation to elevate modern sensibilities at the expense of those considered outdated. Blackmore's views are not one-dimensional, but in his embrace of religious conviction and classical education, wedded to a disgust with contemporary scientific and political theory, he stands as a confident voice upholding what others were breaking down, and today—when a scholar like Wilson can boldly proclaim the triumph of science and Sanders can scorn the conservatism of nineteenth-century culture as embodied in its hymnody—*Lorna Doone* and its author have become downright countercultural, especially when compared with the works of authors who were more willing to compromise with modernity.

In spite of any differences in genre, focus, and worldview, *Lorna Doone* and *Adam Bede* are both part of a strand of British fiction that recognizes ordinary people and ordinary work as worthy subjects for literature.¹⁵ Adam Bede and John Ridd are men of the earth in that they have a strong connection to nature and are dedicated to Edenic virtues such as hard work, honesty, and stewardship. When we first meet Adam, he is in his element, whiling away at a major project in his workshop with several other workmen. A lively conversation ensues in which Adam makes the following remark on the inherent value of work: “But what does the Bible say? Why, it says as God put his sperrit into the workman as built the tabernacle, to make him do all the carved work and things as wanted a nice hand . . . there's the sperrit o' God in all things and all times—weekday as well as Sunday—and i' the great works and inventions, and i' the figuring and the mechanics” (9, ch. I).¹⁶ Adam is most likely alluding to the craftsmen Moses hired to build a mobile tabernacle for the Israelites in the wilderness of Sinai: “He hath filled him with the spirit

¹⁵ Keith writes, “We certainly get a sense in most [British] regional fiction of the everyday world of manual labour; one thinks of the scenes in the carpentry workshop, the dairy, and the farm kitchen in *Adam Bede* . . . nor are these confined to the ‘realistic’ strand in regional writing: there are comparable scenes in Blackmore and Webb” (Keith 8).

¹⁶ Unless otherwise specified, all quotations from the text of *Adam Bede* are pulled from the 2008 Oxford UP edition, edited by Carol Martin.

of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship; and to devise curious works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in the cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of wood, to make any manner of cunning work” (*The Holy Bible, King James Version*, Exod. 35.30-34).¹⁷ If Adam is meant to be a reflection of the biblical Adam, any reader new to Eliot might assume that his vocation would be that of a gardener or farmer, as in Genesis: “And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it” (2.15). Eliot’s Adam is a carpenter, however, an occupation held by no less of a biblical figure than Jesus Christ (Matt. 13.55; Mark 6.3).

In the first chapter of *Lorna Doone*, John Ridd primes us with comparable expectations of a narrative filled with biblical allusions and hard-working rural folk: “I am nothing more than a plain unlettered man, not read in foreign languages, as a gentleman might be, nor gifted with long words (even in mine own tongue), save what I may have won from the Bible, or Master William Shakespeare, whom, in the face of common opinion, I do value highly” (9).¹⁸ John is a wrestler of some talent and a man of enormous strength and size in general. In one passage, John describes one of the Doones’ coming-of-age rites. Allegedly, he says, a young Doone man was measured on his twentieth birthday to see if he could “touch with his forehead the lintel of Sir Ensor’s door, and to fill the door frame with his shoulders from sidepost even to sidepost” (45, ch. V). John scoffs at the test: “For if they had set me in that door-frame at the age of twenty, it is like enough that I should have walked away with it on my shoulders, though I was not come to my full strength then; only I am speaking now of the average size of our neighbourhood, and the Doones were far beyond that” (45). The picture John paints of walking away with the doorframe

¹⁷ Unless otherwise specified, all quotations from the Bible are taken from the King James Version, since this is the Bible that Blackmore, Eliot, and most other writers of the era would have been most familiar with.

¹⁸ John is not being entirely fair to himself, because his knowledge of literature and foreign languages is wider than he gives himself credit for. See chapter four for a more in-depth discussion of this point.

on his shoulders is curiously reminiscent of Samson, the famous biblical figure also known for great feats of strength: “And Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight, and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put them upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of an hill that is before Hebron” (Judg. 16.3). It is safe to assume that the similarity is more than a coincidence, since John likens himself to Samson in a passing reference during his time in London: “Such a yearning seized me for moory crag, and for dewy blade . . . that nothing but the new withs of Samson could have held me in London town” (611, ch. LXIX).¹⁹ Adam Bede’s portrait is painted with similarly flattering tones: “Such a voice could only come from a broad chest, and the broad chest belonged to a large-boned muscular man nearly six feet high . . . when he drew himself up to take a more distant survey of his work, he had the air of a soldier standing at ease. The sleeve rolled up above the elbow showed an arm that was likely to win the prize for feats of strength” (6, ch. I). The soldier simile is repeated later on (352, ch. XXXVIII).

As interesting as the physical similarity between Adam Bede and John Ridd is, the connection between the two goes much deeper. “Gentle giant” is a phrase that might well apply to both men, though there are notable exceptions to this rule of behavior. In Adam’s case, when he discovers that Arthur Donnithorne, once his respected friend and employer, has been flirting and kissing with Hetty Sorrel, the woman Adam loves, Adam loses his normally cool demeanor. Neither man being able to rein in his feelings, a fight ensues that ends badly: “But why did not Arthur rise? He was perfectly motionless, and the time seemed long to Adam. Good God! had the blow been too much for him? Adam shuddered at the thought of his own strength, as with the oncoming of this dread he knelt down by Arthur’s side and lifted his head from among the fern” (272, ch. XXVII). Likewise, John Ridd’s ability to suppress his potential for violence falls away

¹⁹ “Withs” is used in the King James rendering of Judges 16:7, referring to seven cords meant to tie Samson in place.

when Lorna's wellbeing is at stake. In the pivotal scene in which John whisks Lorna away from the Doone Valley, he happens on two men harassing her in the house she shares with her maid: "In a moment I had him round the waist, and he went out of the window with a mighty crash of glass . . . Then I took the other man by the neck . . . I bore him out of the house as lightly as I would bear a baby, yet squeezing his throat a little more than I fain would do to an infant" (358, ch. XLIV). Whatever justification there is for violence in each case, the situation is the same: a tall, muscular hero who leads a rustic life and finds God in the small deeds of everyday life has a temper that flares out in frightful acts of violence when the hero's love interest is injured or in peril. Each claims at least a working knowledge of the Bible, which informs his philosophy of life. It is important to note that both men are tied to a lineage that goes back for centuries—in Adam's case, to the early Celtic inhabitants of Albion or Britain, and in John's case, to Alfred the Great.²⁰ When Carver Doone enters the garden on the Ridd farm where Lorna is minding the flowers and threatens to shoot her, John's response includes an indignant account of his family's history: "Lorna saw his giant figure [Carver Doone] striding across the meadow-land, as if the Ridds were nobodies, and he the proper owner. Both mother and I were greatly hurt at hearing of this insolence: for we had owned that meadow, from the time of the great Alfred; and even when that good king lay in the Isle of Athelney, he had a Ridd along with him" (397, ch. XLVIII). Ancient ancestral ties—to the early inhabitants of the British Isles and to key historical figures—thus lend further credence to the belief that the two protagonists embody the same archetype, or are at least very closely related.

Given such similarities, a reader could be forgiven for thinking that Blackmore and Eliot were coming from the same place philosophically. In their appreciation for England's dwindling

²⁰ "Adam's surname alludes to the Venerable Bede, the eighth-century Benedictine monk . . . This connection with the virtues and values of the Anglo-Saxon race, as well as the 'Celtic blood' tying his lineage to the pre-Roman inhabitants of Britain and his given name, from the biblical Adam, mark him as an archetypal figure" (Martin 498).

rural culture, this was certainly true, but the differences between the two novels reflect two distinct approaches to the controversies of the Victorian era: conservatism and compromise. As the conservative in this equation, Blackmore “disapproved of the social and political developments of his time” and makes it known through his narrative choices (Keith 71). Eliot the compromiser “rejects absolute moral judgements . . . Nobody in Eliot’s fiction is either transcendently good or wicked beyond redemption” (Eagleton 163). Carver Doone is not a redemptive figure; his wickedness splashes almost every page of *Lorna Doone*, and he does not have the understandable motives of his grandfather Ensor, who was allegedly cheated out of his lands. For Carver, we may feel awe, hatred, or even fear—but sympathy is unlikely, given that virtually every action the man takes is intended to hurt others, and there is no good reason for it other than his desire to mark territory or prove his own power. It could be argued that the novel’s point of view is to blame for this lack of sympathy, since it is only natural that John Ridd would have nothing good to say about his father’s killer. Regardless of whether John’s black-and-white approach to the world is a reflection on the author, Blackmore’s choice to write his story in first-person sets him apart from Eliot, who would never have written a character like Carver, at least without giving the reader a chance to sympathize with Carver on some level. Eagleton articulates Eliot’s more sympathetic approach to the characters in her fiction: “The more you understand the truth of another’s situation, the more you can grasp how the world seems from their standpoint; and the more you do this, the less likely you are to pass external, dogmatic judgements on them. For Eliot, this fellow-feeling is the very essence of morality” (165). Ted Zenzingers’s argument follows a similar vein: “In *Adam Bede*, we find that Eliot is offering us a broader view of sympathy that does not require specific related experiences or specific resemblances; it is a view of sympathy that incorporates transformative pain and a key

role for the imagination” (438). Blackmore and Eliot were interested in the lives of ordinary people, but where Eliot found a way to reconcile tradition with the new secular order, believing no one is totally good or totally evil and everyone deserves a fair shake, Blackmore held to a more dualistic view of morality and of how literature should be written that was beginning to fade from vogue.

Genre is one important tool that helps each author express these variant philosophies. Broadly speaking, *Adam Bede* embraces literary realism, and *Lorna Doone* is a romance. The “realistic” approach aids Eliot in drawing nuanced—i.e. sympathetic—characters, and romance allows Blackmore to play with extreme incarnations of good and evil, but there is more overlap than one might expect. Blackmore asserts the following in the original preface to *Lorna Doone*:

This work is called a “romance,” because the incidents, characters, time, and scenery, are alike romantic. And in shaping this old tale, the Writer neither dares, nor desires, to claim for it the dignity or cumber it with the difficulty of an historic novel. And yet he thinks that the outlines are filled in more carefully, and the situations (however simple) more warmly coloured and quickened, than a reader would expect to find in what is called a “legend.” (3)

In a way, this creates as many new questions as it answers. Blackmore’s words are a tautology: “This book is a romance, because it is romantic.” Little attempt is made to define terms, as if it is assumed the reader will already understand what Blackmore means by “romance,” “historic novel,” and “legend.” Clues can certainly be drawn from the context, however. On one end of the spectrum, Blackmore appears to be associating “romance” and “legend” with exaggeration and artistic license, whereas the “historic novel” requires careful outlines and a certain depth of “situation” that is rarely found on that other end of the spectrum. The former tends to sacrifice

accuracy whenever diverging from the historical account improves the narrative coherence or increases the entertainment value of the story; the latter clings to the facts as much as possible, working within what we know and filling in the gaps wherever necessary.²¹ We know that *Lorna Doone* is based on Blackmore's research into local legends and topography, but absolute fidelity to the landscape and the historical record was not his intention. When the author of a handbook on Great Britain wrote to express his surprise at the "discrepancy" between the scenery in *Lorna Doone* and its inspirations from real life, Blackmore's response was, "If I had dreamed that it ever would be more than a book of the moment, the descriptions of scenery—which I know as well as I know my garden— would have been kept nearer to their fact. I romanced therein, not to mislead any other, but solely for the uses of my story" (qtd. in Dunn 139). Keith expounds on the usefulness of this method: "The romantic form of *Lorna Doone* makes possible a structural symmetry that would seem out of place in a work fully committed to realism. The parallelism by contrast of John Ridd and Carver Doone is an obvious instance" (83). This gives us a good idea of what Blackmore meant when he called his work a romance; in a world like Eliot's that insists on sympathy with all, "structural symmetry" and "parallelism by contrast" are artificial concepts that distort the complex nature of morality. The author of a romance such as *Lorna Doone* is bound by different artistic laws than the author of *Adam Bede*. Eliot makes her purpose explicit in the opening paragraphs of Chapter XVII:

If I held it the highest vocation of the novelist to represent things as they never have been and never will be . . . I might refashion life and character entirely after my own liking . . . But it happens, on the contrary, that my strongest effort is to

²¹ This agrees with the statements of prior commentators like Merchant and Keith. Merchant's assessment is that "Blackmore looks back in *Lorna Doone* to what Exmoor was like before 1700, or rather to what we might want to imagine that Exmoor then was like . . . Clearly, the controlling strategy of a book begun in that fashion is not to record a landscape so much as to arrange one" (243).

avoid any such arbitrary picture, and to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind . . . I feel as much bound to tell you as precisely as I can what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box narrating my experience on oath. (159)

Eliot's approach is not without its own set of problems. The phrase "as they have mirrored themselves in my mind" suggests that novelists are always, to some extent, handicapped by their own "arbitrary picture" of the world. Rebecca Gould zeroes in on this passage to examine the strengths and weaknesses of Eliot's realist aesthetic: "While they may appear at first glance as ideal mediums for literary realism, mirrors do not necessarily depict things as they are, but rather magnify objects that fall into their line of vision while foreshortening the surrounding environs" (419). Eliot is frequently labeled a "realist," but she is essentially trading one form of romance for another. Objects that fall into her line of vision, such as Adam Bede, are magnified to larger-than-life proportions, and characters and events that do not fall into this line of vision are left to fill in the background. Many of Eliot's early American readers, before they became aware of her secular worldview, saw in novels such as *Adam Bede* "an idealized view of the ordinary in which a realism of presentation served an idealistic and transcendental conception of life" (Griffith 37). In this light, Eliot might safely be labeled a writer of romances; the difference is that her subjects are ordinary rural folk instead of gods, mythological creatures, or even legendary figures like the Doones.

Since *Lorna Doone* is narrated from John Ridd's perspective, this sometimes limits the reader's ability to appreciate the subtleties of other characters. Shuttleworth acknowledges this eloquently in her introduction: "The representation of Lorna is perhaps the most problematic in the text, since it remains untouched by irony: the limitations of John's visions are never exposed.

She thus remains for us, as for John, a fragile beauty whose ‘power of weakness’ calls forth all his protective instincts, though Blackmore does endow her with a warmth of physical response which was unusual for his time” (xviii-xix). When Mrs. Ridd quips at one point, “There you are again, John . . . all about men, and not a single word about women,” the quip could easily be read as a commentary on the limits of a first-person narrative (399, ch. XLVIII). Everything we learn about Exmoor and the men and women who live there is filtered through John, and so we must accept that what we are receiving is going to be colored by the biases of that narrator. A caution is in order, however. Since John opens his narrative with the claim that he is “an ignoramus, but pretty well for a yeoman,” it is sorely tempting to take him at his word and assume that his views on life and the people around him are uneducated (9, ch. I). This is too simple a characterization. While John is no Oxford don, his knowledge of Shakespeare and the Bible—and even a handful of classical texts—is such that he manages to correct the mistaken literary attribution of Carver’s father, upstaging an aristocrat and earning himself the title of “one who meddles with the Muses” (427, ch. LI). Chapter four will deal with John’s literary allusions, including his correction of the Counsellor’s bungled *Hamlet* quotation, in much more detail, but it is enough here to note that he is no uneducated simpleton.

In *Adam Bede*, the limitations of the narrative are subtler. Deanna Kreisel discusses Eliot’s career-long tendency to indulge in fits of authorial intrusion: “Certainly for the original critics of Eliot’s novels, the intrusive philosophizing and directive interpreting of their narrators is an aesthetic, if not a moral, failing—a criticism whose motivation is understandable when we consider how the narratorial intervention seems to undermine cherished Victorian claims for realism” (542-43). Eliot’s external narrator seemingly allows the reader to study the community of Hayslope from multiple perspectives and offers an illusion of objectivity superior to the single

voice featured in *Lorna Doone*, but the passages in which Eliot addresses the reader directly throw some doubt on the idea that *Adam Bede*'s third-person voice is any more objective than John Ridd's first-person voice in *Lorna Doone*.²² The narrator's use of "I" reminds the reader that even a third-person narrative is the production of one voice: that of the author. Therefore, any claim to objectivity is, in the end, a bluff that assumes the reader's ignorance of the author's biases and preconceptions. In the case of *Lorna Doone* versus *Adam Bede*, this means the reader is left with the task of discerning what sort of worldview is expressed by the voice of Blackmore and John Ridd on one side and by the voice of George Eliot and her narrator on the other.

One valuable point of comparison between the novels is in the harvest scenes and the celebrations that follow the work of the laborers; here we see Eliot's secularism diverging from Blackmore's Christian faith. Blackmore's harvest chapter, "Reaping Leads to Reveling," is rich with more of his descriptions of nature: "Then the golden harvest came, waving on the broad hill-side, and nestling in the quiet nooks scooped from out the fringe of wood. A wealth of harvest, such as never gladdened all our country-side since my father ceased to reap, and his sickle hung to rust" (221, ch. XXIX). What follows, again from John's point of view, is an exhaustive account of the first day of harvest, including the arrival of the local farmers and their families, the parson's invocation of God's blessing, the movement of the laborers as they clear the field, and the breaks for eating and drinking. The chapter peaks with a lengthy transcription of an "Exmoor harvest-song," which includes five complete verses, each with its accompanying chorus. John offers the song "as sung in my time . . . omitting only the dialect, which perchance might puzzle [the reader]" (226). Each verse and its chorus in turn focus on a specific crop, beginning with corn, which is followed by wheat, barley, oats, and ending once again with corn.

²² Eliot's long interruption of the plot in Chapter XVII to explain her approach to narrative is a good example.

The mix of agricultural imagery and enthusiastic revelry on the part of the Exmoor community makes for an unusually potent evocation of rural life.

Eliot follows a similar pattern in *Adam Bede*, with the exception that we do not get the minute description of the harvest offered in *Lorna Doone*. Adam is not a farm laborer, so he has no practical motivation to be near the center of the action, unlike John Ridd, whose living hinges on the annual crop. However, Adam does participate in a ceremonial revelry very much like that depicted in *Lorna Doone*. At the Hall Farm, he joins in the feast to mark the last barley harvest of the season. A raucous song follows the feast, accompanied by a drinking game. The lyrics to the song are not provided in as comprehensive a manner as they are in *Blackmore*, but we do get a sampling of what the men are singing:

Then drink, boys, drink!
And see ye do not spill,
For if ye do, ye shall drink two,
For 'tis our master's will. (465, ch. LIII)

The subject of the song, in this case, is drinking, whereas in *Lorna Doone* it is the crop. Another difference worth noting is that the song in *Adam Bede* is addressed to the farmer in charge of the labor force, but the “Exmoor harvest-song” as recorded by John Ridd continually references God, as in “So shall we acknowledge it, before we reap the morn, / With our hands to heaven, and our knees unto the Lord” (227, ch. XXIX). The difference in emphasis is suggestive of the different worldviews Blackmore and Eliot held. Blackmore and John Ridd are both devout Anglicans. In Chapter V of *Lorna Doone*, John makes this abundantly clear: “Once for all let me declare, that I am a thorough-going Church-and-State man, and Royalist, without any mistake about it” (43). This is as much a political as a religious statement, but in John’s case, faith in God as provider

and sustainer is also key to who he is. At the end of the novel, when he realizes that Lorna will survive Carver's bullet, John describes his thoughts: "I felt my life come back, and glow; I felt my trust in God revive;²³ I felt the joy of living and of loving dearer things than life" (661, ch. LXXV). Simple gratitude to God is a common theme for Blackmore's rural Exmoor folk. Eliot begins *Adam Bede* with a flurry of biblical and religious allusions, including a quotation from a Methodist hymn that would have been familiar to many of her initial readers. However, as Martin points out, the lyrics Eliot chose "emphasize secular values, especially the value of work, rather than spiritual values, which are the main emphasis of Ken's hymn" (498). It is easy to miss this distinction amongst all the biblical imagery Eliot uses in the novel, but that distinction is vital to understanding who Eliot is, as Eagleton reminds us in his historical account of the era: "A rationalist, increasingly secular society was in need of a new mythology, and it was Eliot's fiction above all which accomplished this task for her anxious contemporaries . . . Fact and feeling, the head and the heart, blend in the texture of Eliot's level-headed yet lively prose style, as well as in the subject-matter of her novels" (166). The same scene in which Eliot introduces Adam singing the hymn and making reference to the workmen who constructed the tabernacle is also the scene in which Adam marks a major difference between himself and more hardline doctrinally-minded religious figures like Dinah Morris and her Methodist colleagues:

There's the sperrit o' God in all things and all times—weekday as well as Sunday
 . . . if a man does bits o' jobs out o' working hours—builds a oven for 's wife to
 save her from going to the bakehouse, or scrats at his bit o' garden and makes two

²³ In the first edition and those that follow the first edition text, this line reads, "I felt my trust in women flow" rather than "I felt my trust in God revive." Most subsequent editions, including the Oxford UP and Wordsworth editions, have used Blackmore's revision. The first edition did not sell well, so the majority of readers are likely to have seen only the revised form of this passage quoted here.

potatoes grow instead o' one, he's doing more good, and he's just as near to God,
as if he was running after some preacher and a-praying and a-groaning. (9, ch. I)

Eliot strikes a delicate balance in *Adam Bede*. Her respect for the Bible and those who hold by its tenets is clear—and nowhere is that more clear than in the marriage of Adam and Dinah—but Adam's secular practicality, mixed in with his religious sensibilities, prevents *Adam Bede* the novel from becoming a paean to orthodox Christianity. Similarly, John Ridd's identity as a Church-and-State man is never pushed on the reader with any zeal; for the most part, he seems content to live on his farm amongst the people he loves and leave the political battles to others. Still, John makes no secret of his beliefs and is therefore a figure whose convictions stand in contrast to those of Adam Bede, who seems to be even less interested in drawing sectarian lines than John is.²⁴

At least one scholar in recent years has sensed an element of conservatism in Eliot, but this conservatism is limited in its scope. Evan Horowitz notes that Eliot was deeply unsettled by the advent of the railroad, which she saw as a parable of reckless, uncontrollable progress. When William Huskisson, a vocal supporter of the railroad, was crushed to death by an oncoming train, many saw this as a terrible omen, a sign that humanity had crossed a dangerous line from which there could be no turning back: "For Eliot, Huskisson's death was a parable of modernity—the moment when history stops working like a coach and starts running like a railway. It reflects a newfound inability to participate in the making of history or to shape the course of progress. Instead, control is ceded to a force . . . we cannot direct even if it threatens to run us over or hurl us into an abyss" (8). This might just as easily be a description of the views of Blackmore, who

²⁴ In Chapter XIII, John refers to the Doones as "dishonest folk," "robbers," and "good Papists" in the same paragraph (102). In Chapter XLIII, when the Doones are lighting a beacon, John wonders aloud, "Papists burn Protestants in the flesh; and Protestants burn Papists in effigy . . . Lorna, are they going to burn any one to-night?" (352).

saw “omens of doom” in almost every sector of British society (Sutton 90). One must be careful, however, not to attribute more conservatism to Eliot than she really felt. While *Adam Bede* is the work of a writer lamenting the beauty of the rural English community as it fell beneath the wheel of progress, the secular themes of the novel as expressed by its title character suggest that Eliot’s discomfort with progress extended only so far. Whatever the terrible power of new technologies like the railroad, there was plenty of room for improvement and the advancement of knowledge in religion and science—this kind of progress, apparently, did not inspire the same horror in Eliot as the railroad itself.

On the flipside, R.D. Blackmore may appear, superficially, to be a man of liberality in religion, but this liberality—like Eliot’s conservatism—is limited in scope. Two years before his death, Blackmore would write the following: “My father . . . was as popular with the Dissenters as with the Church-men; and I esteem his memory all the more for his Christian liberality. I have no faith in the Christianity of any man so narrow-minded that he will not appear on the same platform with those who differ from him in the matter of interpretation of the Scriptures” (qtd. in Dunn 89). In a country with a long history of sectarian religious conflict, this attitude is unusual, but grace for the unorthodox in his fellow Christians is not to be mistaken for a lack of conviction. The science and secularism of Eliot and Hardy were out of the question. Budd leaves us no room for doubt: “Hardy, who was later to sneer violently against Browning’s ‘smug Christian optimism,’ would no doubt have made the same comments about Blackmore’s robust, personal religion” (74). Whatever else “Christian liberality” may have meant to him, Blackmore was a man of firm religious conviction, and we see this conviction reflected in John Ridd, *Lorna Doone*’s protagonist. It is trust in the God of the Bible—one of John’s two favorite books—that he speaks of when Lorna begins to show signs of recovery from her wound in the final chapters.

It is God, as opposed to the human “master” referenced in Eliot’s harvest song, to whom Exmoor laborers express their gratitude for their wealth of harvest. It is God and his son Jesus Christ, so near to and yet so far from the characters in Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, who personify the whole foundation of Blackmore’s faith. In the next chapter, it will become even more clear, in a comparison of *Lorna Doone* with *Tess*, that Blackmore is a man who refused to concede the end of faith in an era of burgeoning doubt.

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3. “A Thorough-Going Church-and-State Man”: Blackmore as Champion of Tradition

In my comparison of Blackmore and Eliot, I emphasized the difference in the authors’ attitudes toward the tide of cultural change that swept England in the middle of the nineteenth century. From scientific developments and religious controversy to innovations in the transportation industry—such as the rise of the railroad—the traditional ways of making a living and of understanding humanity’s place in the world were being joined by new ideas and in some cases discarded altogether. Eliot attempted to integrate what she saw as valuable in the old ways of rural life and religious belief with current philosophical debates and advances in scientific theory. By contrast, R.D. Blackmore resisted what he saw as a dangerous disruption to tradition. His religious and political beliefs would stay firmly rooted in tradition and orthodoxy to the end of his life.

If the differences between Blackmore and Eliot are relatively clear, the contrast is even sharper with Thomas Hardy, further demonstrating the potential for conservative Victorian voices to bring balance to modern perspectives on the era and its diverse array of worldviews. Eliot’s stance on Christian doctrine may not have been orthodox, but her portraits of Christian people and beliefs in *Adam Bede* are mostly charitable. Hardy, in works such as *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, paints a pessimistic portrait indeed. Eagleton labels him as a “devout atheist,” a claim that is true to a point but does not accurately reflect Hardy’s appreciation of Christianity’s mythical framework and ethical positions (201). In any case, he did not share Blackmore’s confidence in orthodoxy; instead, he dared to show his readers a world in which Christianity is powerless when the truth of its doctrines and the consolations of belief are needed most desperately. While this is not an unusual perception of Hardy, the contrast with Blackmore and

Lorna Doone makes the visit to familiar critical territory more compelling than it might otherwise be.

Compared to Dunn's thorough treatment, Kenneth Budd's biography of Blackmore may be remarkable for little else, but his commentary on the 1875 meeting between Blackmore and Hardy is rich with possibilities for analysis. By the time they met, both men were acknowledged for their contributions to pastoral literature. Budd points out that they "were united in a love for customs and traditions that were passing away; both had ears that could catch, and be delighted by, the cadences of old songs that sprang from the heart of the people" (72). Classical literature had formed the foundation of their intellectual development, but the difference in their responses to the widespread challenges to Christian orthodoxy could not have been greater. Hardy "turned with enthusiasm to the writings of the scientific materialists, and came to believe that the Church was not anxious to bless and encourage the seeking mind" (73). Budd describes Blackmore as a man of "robust, personal religion" and notes that "if they [Blackmore and Hardy] touched on these subjects in their conversation, we may perhaps assume that Hardy left Gomer House with a certain envy of such assurance in a region where he could not follow" (74).

The extent of the differences between Hardy and Blackmore become more apparent with a side-by-side examination of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Lorna Doone*. *Tess* is a hard look at the failure of God and traditional religious institutions to address the core questions of heart and intellect, all cloaked in a more realistic setting than the Exmoor of the Doones, and *Lorna Doone* is an optimistic take on the power of love and the benevolence of God in the midst of the most trying and fantastical circumstances. As Adam Bede and John Ridd express both the similarities and the differences between Eliot and Blackmore, so Angel Clare and John Ridd express what Budd seems to be getting at in his summary of Hardy and Blackmore. Clare, like his creator, is a

thorough-going skeptic who nonetheless retains a lingering affection for the religion he grew up with, however deeply flawed he believes it to be, and Ridd, like Blackmore, is a “thorough-going Church-and-State man.”

In both *Tess* and *Lorna Doone*, the hero's sexual attachment to the heroine and the spiritual struggle that parallels this attachment reflect the author's outlook on life, whether that reflection is intentional or not. In *Tess*, Angel is a seeker raised by traditionalists. Though unwilling to dispense with his upbringing entirely, he is hardly an orthodox Christian. His father is a Calvinist minister “in the old and ardent sense of the Evangelical school,” and we learn that Angel was once intended for the cloth before coming to the realization that he did not share the beliefs of his parents and his elder brothers (131, ch. XVIII).²⁵ Angel's blunt words to his father express an attitude of respectful skepticism: “I fear I could not conscientiously [take orders]. I love the Church as one loves a parent. I shall always have the warmest affection for her. There is no institution for whose history I have a deeper admiration; but I cannot honestly be ordained her minister, as my brothers are, while she refuses to liberate her mind from an untenable redemptive theolatriy” (131).²⁶ Nancy Barrineau indicates that Angel is referring to the Church of England's Thirty-Nine Articles—specifically, to the article that endorses Christ's resurrection (Hardy 428). Angel cannot accept this doctrine, and therefore he cannot become the cleric his father wants him to be.

Angel's inability to accept Christ as God forces him to find a god among his fellow mortals. That god—or goddess in this case—is Tess: “Hardy shows that Angel's solution [to his

²⁵ One might wonder if Blackmore disliked the kind of judgmental Calvinist religion portrayed in *Tess* as much as Hardy did, but this is a distraction from the main point: that Blackmore still believed the traditional doctrines of Christianity—common to almost all denominations—to be valid, while Hardy went beyond criticizing particular denominations to deny core Christian doctrines, such as the divinity and resurrection of Christ.

²⁶ Unless otherwise specified, all quotations from the text of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* are pulled from the 2008 Oxford UP edition, edited by Juliet Grindle et al.

spiritual needs], a kind of vague and unexamined neopaganism, proves not only illusory, but dangerous. In enshrining Tess in his pagan pantheon . . . Angel turns her into a symbol of a way of life and a system of values, and ultimately plays an important role in her destruction” (Bonica 851). Angel believes that Article Four cannot hold up to the rigors of modern science and philosophy, but in his rejection of Jesus as the Church of England has codified him, he sets up a false Christ in the person of Tess. When she fails to live up to his impossibly high standards, he casts her away with the fervor of an Old Testament prophet: “O Tess, forgiveness does not apply to the case! You were one person; now you are another. My God—how can forgiveness meet such a grotesque—prestidigitation as that!” (248, ch. XXXV). His response to her confession of her past reads like the fulfillment of the words of Isaiah: “Ye shall defile also the covering of thy graven images of silver, and the ornament of thy molten images of gold: thou shalt cast them away as a menstruous cloth; thou shalt say unto it, Get thee hence” (Isa 30.22). “Thou shalt cast them away as a menstruous cloth” is particularly apt in this case, considering Angel’s obsession with the status of Tess’s physical and moral purity. Unfortunately for the both of them, Angel is unable to escape his delusional perceptions of Tess in time to keep her from her fateful reunion with Alec. Oliver Lovesey expresses the nature of Angel’s journey with more religious imagery, this time from the New Testament:

Tess’s narrative logic or illogic attempts to resolve Angel’s religious dilemma through a sexualized reconstruction of the resurrection, extrapolated in a displaced religious allegory. Angel idealizes Tess, and the reconstruction of her virginity replaces the resurrection in his religion of unbelief. This demythologizing transmogrification resolves Angel’s anxieties about Christian doctrine in material terms. (914)

By the time he returns to England, Angel has cleared up many of the issues that caused him to cast away his idol—or his savior, depending on whether one prefers the Old Testament imagery in Charlotte Bonica’s argument or the New Testament imagery in Lovesey’s. The damage has already been done, however.

What is curious about Hardy, especially when *Tess* is juxtaposed with *Lorna Doone*, is that he does not reject Christianity per se. James Russell Perkin makes the startling observation, “Hardy’s attack on various distorted versions of Christianity assumes as a point of reference the existence of an *authentic gospel truth*, but that evangel is only present in the novel as a negation, as though its incarnation in the modern world were an impossibility” (184, emphasis added). This is a critical distinction. It is as if Hardy’s characters—and Hardy himself, perhaps—are *lamenting* the existential absence of a savior rather than merely *demonstrating* it from their own experience. For the author’s attacks on hypocrisy and cruelty to have any meaning, there must be a legitimate expression of Christianity against which to compare what is not legitimate. In the preface to the fifth edition of *Tess*, Hardy berated a certain segment of his critics for failing to remember “the finest side of their own Christianity” (5). Hence Perkin’s assertion that Hardy is implying the existence of an “authentic gospel truth,” a truth that none of his characters seem to be able to lay hold on.

In *Lorna Doone*, John Ridd’s spiritual journey throughout the novel challenges his sectarian religious mindset and strengthens his faith in God. As with Angel, his trial of faith is centered on the woman he loves. Born and raised as an Anglican, he marries the heiress of one of England’s most prominent Catholic families. His trust in Lorna’s goodness is severely tested during her absence in London, but for the most part he continues to hold out hope of her, and his trust is finally rewarded when he gains her hand. After Lorna is shot at their wedding and John

fears for her life, his confidence in God is shaken, but upon her recovery, confidence revives and expresses itself in gratitude to the Creator.

John's self-identification as a Church-and-State man, not surprisingly, is joined by an instinctive mistrust of Catholics. The word "Papist" appears in the text of *Lorna Doone* some eighteen times, sometimes as part of the dialogue of other characters, though often from the pen of John Ridd himself. References to the Pope and "Popery" are common as well, and in most of these cases the faith is painted in a negative light. Early on, in his account of his education, John remarks that "the principal business of good Christians is, beyond all controversy, to fight with one another" (15, ch. II). This sentiment foreshadows the lethal struggles that will break out later in the narrative during Monmouth's rebellion and the dispute over the royal succession, with its attendant religious element. John acknowledges that his mother's biggest objections to his marriage with Lorna are her young age and her faith: "As we had all been Protestants from the time of Queen Elizabeth, the maiden must be converted first, and taught to hate all Papists. Now Lorna had not the smallest idea of ever being converted. She said that she loved me truly, but wanted not to convert me; and if I loved her equally, why should I wish to convert her? With this I was tolerably content" (413, ch. L). John consoles himself with the conviction that Lorna "[knows] but little of the Popish ways," since the Catholic Doones are only nominally religious. However, when Lorna learns of her true ancestry as a member of the Lorne family, she is swept off to London by the authorities and doted on by the Queen. In London, John learns that Lorna now practices her faith regularly: "Now since the King had begun to attend the celebration of mass . . . he had given order that the doors should be thrown open, so that all . . . might see this form of worship. Master Ramsack told me [John] that Lorna was there almost every Sunday; their Majesties being most anxious to have the presence of all the nobility of the Catholic

persuasion, so as to make a goodly show” (584, ch. LXVI). A gap thus exists between the two lovers, not just in social class but in religious affiliation. The eventual marriage is a product of compromise in more ways than one. As a device to resolve the difference in class, Blackmore has James II reward John with a knighthood for his services to the crown, though this is partly because the king is under the mistaken assumption that John is a good Catholic (ch. LXVIII). Lorna is allowed to wed John in a ceremony conducted by Parson Bowden in the parish of Oare, eschewing both the traditional expectations of her faith and her class.²⁷ In their union, John and Lorna join “the best of noble blood and the solidity of middle rank” (Knights xxxi).

Deeper still than the important questions of social class and religious affiliation are the feelings John has towards Lorna throughout the novel. His love for Lorna is closely tied to his faith in God, in a way that is similar—though with a very different outcome—to the love Angel has for Tess in Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*. When Lorna moves to London, John’s trust in her is severely tested, because in the long months that follow her leaving, he writes to her almost daily, and the letters never receive a single reply. In spite of their mutual discouragement, both John and Lorna stay loyal to one another until they finally come together again and learn that the reason for the lack of correspondence is that Lorna’s maid deliberately failed to carry the letters, believing John the farmer was not good enough for Lady Lorna Dugal. What makes the reaction of Blackmore’s characters to separation so different from Hardy’s is that neither gives himself or herself over to a third party. John comes close in his flirtation with his cousin Ruth in Chapter LXVI when he is in the thick of his depression over Lorna’s absence, but the flirtation is brief and never as serious as the warped attachment between Tess and Alec. As John puts it to Lorna:

²⁷ Bowden is a High-Church Anglican, so the difference in ceremonies is not as great as it could be. In Chapter L, when Lorna attends church with John for the first time, Bowden conducts the service “with pleasant imitation of her old Priest’s sacred rites” (413). In the same passage, John also claims that Bowden thinks of Lorna’s faith as a “higher” religion (414).

“Ruth Huckaback is a worthy maid . . . and she alone of all our world, except indeed poor Annie, has kept her confidence in you, and told me not to dread your rank, but trust your heart, Lady Lorna” (590, ch. LXVII). Last, but certainly not the least of the steps in John’s spiritual journey, is his crisis of faith when Lorna is shot just as he prepares to kiss her at their wedding: “The sound of a shot rang through the church, and those eyes were dim with death” (649, ch. LXXIV). The language in the paragraphs that follow continually suggests that Lorna is dead and will not be coming back to life. Observing the body, John notes that “the only sign of life remaining was a drip of bright red blood” and refers to her as “the young death” (649). It is not until he returns from his final bout with Carver that John learns there is hope for Lorna’s “resurrection,” thanks to the timely ministrations of Ruth. Everyone else at the site of Lorna’s apparent death believes that Ruth is “a simple idiot” for tending to the body (657, ch. LXXV). It is crucial to note the symbolism of this passage and its parallels with the biblical account of one of Christ’s miracles, because it gives us a clue to unlocking the source of Blackmore’s religious optimism, so key to the contrast with Hardy’s religious despair in *Tess*. The account of this miracle is found in three of the four Gospels (Mark 5, Matt. 9, Luke 8). As Jesus is traveling the countryside, a high-ranking synagogue official approaches him with a desperate request: to save his dying daughter’s life. On the way to the official’s house, Jesus is delayed by the crowds, and a messenger brings the report that the official’s daughter has died. “Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole,” Jesus insists (Luke 8.50). In *Lorna Doone*, Ruth echoes these words of consolation at Lorna’s sickroom: “John, she is not your dead one. She may even be your living one yet, your wife, your home, and your happiness” (656, ch. LXXV). Just as the wedding guests think Ruth a fool for believing she can bring Lorna back, the mourners at the synagogue official’s house refuse to stop grieving at what they assume is the site of a funeral, not a healing: “And they

laughed him [Jesus] to scorn, knowing that she was dead” (Luke 8.53). Both Ruth and Lorna are Christ figures in the final chapter of *Lorna Doone*, Ruth for her role as healer and Lorna for her role as dying-and-rising emblem of John’s faith: “She [Ruth] probed the vile wound in [Lorna’s] side, and fetched the reeking bullet forth; and then with the coldest water staunched the flowing of the life-blood” (656, ch. LXXV). The blood-and-water imagery recalls Christ’s death as described in the Gospel of John: “But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water” (19.34). Two of the instruments Ruth uses in her attentions to Lorna are no less symbolic: “Then she [Ruth] parted the pearly teeth . . . and poured in wine from a christening spoon” (656, ch. LXXV). The Eucharistic wine and the christening spoon combine to form a picture of a new Christian life. When Lorna recovers a few days later, John expresses his gratitude in a manner consistent with these symbols: “I felt my life come back, and glow; I felt my trust in God revive; I felt the joy of living and of loving dearer things than life” (661, ch. LXXV). As Lorna revives, so does John’s faith in a loving God whose providence over creation and the destinies of men and maids alike will never be thwarted by the deeds of men such as Carver. The Christian element in the ending is joined by the author’s conservative Victorianism: “John proves his masculinity by rescuing from the clutches of his social superiors his child bride who then becomes an embodiment of the angel in the house, creating an enclave of domestic bliss” (Shuttleworth xxv). In 1869, this was a bold statement on Blackmore’s part in the face of increasing skepticism about God’s providence and a woman’s traditional place in the home.

On the surface, Blackmore’s viewpoint is not that different from Hardy’s. One of Blackmore’s most explicit statements of faith appears in *Cradock Nowell*, which immediately preceded *Lorna Doone*:

To a thoughtful man, who is scandalized at all the littleness felt and done under the holy name . . . it is reassurance to remember that we are not Christians yet, and comfort to confess that on earth we never can be. For nothing shows more clearly that our faith is of heaven, than the truth that we cannot rise to it until it raise us thither . . . Let us call it [Christianity] a worn-out garb, when we have begun to wear it; as yet the mantle is in the skies, and we have only the skirt with the name on it. (96, ch. XI)

Hardy denies the possibility of authentic gospel *truth* on earth, and Blackmore denies the possibility of authentic Christian *behavior* on earth, at least in its fullest sense. The difference is subtle, but it is essential. One man wishes Christ's resurrection was true, but he cannot accept that it is, and so he is left to admire a moral and ethical framework that he believes is based on a falsehood. The other accepts the truth of the resurrection but does not believe that any person will be able to live up to Christ's example until reaching heaven. Both see a major problem with the present state of things, and yet one believes he has nothing to look forward to, while the other believes he has everything to look forward to.

Hardy's response to Christianity is not black-and-white, as Eagleton would have us believe. Christianity, as an institution and especially as a set of historical assertions, suffers a great deal in *Tess*. Compounding its scientific and philosophical failures is the failure of its proponents to aid Tess in her time of greatest need. In Chapter XLIV, after Angel has departed for Brazil and Tess is essentially on her own, Tess visits the Clare parsonage to implore the assistance of Angel's family. In what could be read as an ironic, if tragic, parallel with Christ's words in Revelation 3:20²⁸—especially given Angel's unfortunate tendency to deify Tess—no

²⁸ "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

one answers the door. Later, Tess overhears Angel's brothers gossiping about her with Mercy Chant, the woman Angel's parents had intended as his wife. Their words pain Tess, and she flees only to run to her fatal encounter with Alec. Instead of helping a woman in need, these Christians have pushed her further towards perdition. Everywhere Tess turns, there are hypocrites, fools, and lukewarm representatives of Christianity who fail to prove the validity of their own beliefs by example. If Perkin is correct and Hardy's criticisms are based on the assumption of an authentic gospel truth, the implication in *Tess* is that Christianity would have the potential to be a catalyst for great good if only that gospel actually existed in the real world—not just in a historical resurrection, but also in the Christ-like behavior of Christ's followers. As Lance Butler rightly points out, "It could be claimed that [Hardy] works in an ironic mode with Christian symbols, but he uses them so much...that there comes a point at which we must suspect his imitation of becoming flattery" (qtd. in Perkin 161). What sets Hardy apart from Blackmore is his favorable attitude towards the scientific and philosophical developments of the late nineteenth century. Orthodox Christianity, with its literalistic acceptance of the Bible and its perceived tendency to judge and condemn others, is not-so-subtly symbolized in the "staring vermillion words" painted into life by an old man who accompanies Tess on her return home from the Durbeyfield estate: "Some people might have cried, 'Alas, poor Theology!' at the hideous defacement [of the stile]—the last grotesque phase of a creed which had served mankind well in its time" (91, ch. XII).

Given the triumphant tone of *Lorna Doone*'s conclusion and the presence of so many symbols of Christian orthodoxy, the friendship between Hardy and Blackmore is remarkable. Blackmore's steadfast faith was very different from the direction Hardy and his peers had been taking. Perkin elaborates: "Each of these novelists [Hardy, Eliot, Trollope, Thackeray, et al.]

writes as an insider, as someone intimately acquainted with the theological disputes that were rending the Church of England . . . They all take for granted the existence of liberal biblical hermeneutics in a way that was not possible for writers born earlier in the century” (160). While Blackmore may have been tolerant enough of religious differences to marry a Catholic and to maintain friendships and correspondences with individuals from various walks of life, there is little evidence to suggest he ever entertained serious doubts about the resurrection of Christ, the validity of scripture, or other core doctrines of the Church. Angel Clare and John Ridd undergo a similar trial of faith, but where Angel’s trial ends in disillusionment—and for Tess herself, in death—John passes his trial and finds his happiness with Lorna, the woman he loves.

Hardy and Blackmore are both complex characters in themselves, and it would be a disservice to make sweeping assumptions about either. However, it should be clear by now which end of the philosophical spectrum each falls on. Both had an affection for the kinds of rural communities and traditions they portrayed in literary form, and the two lamented, each in his own way, the passing of these traditions in the face of societal change. *Tess* and *Lorna Doone*—whatever the differences between their authors—are tributes to vanishing ways of life and ways of thinking. Hardy kept his gaze focused firmly on contemporary people and events; through Angel, he depicted the heartache of modern intellectuals struggling to deal with the breakdown of systems like the Church, once considered immutable. Traditional Christianity’s historical claims are dismissed as “untenable redemptive theolatri,” but Angel’s attempts to find a workable alternative fail miserably and leave his lover Tess as dead as his faith in orthodoxy. Blackmore reached back two hundred years to pay homage to the common people who lived on Exmoor during a turbulent period of English history. John Ridd finds comfort in his Christian faith, and that faith sustains him in a time of doubt over Lorna’s love and later over whether she

will survive Carver's bullet. John's faith is ultimately rewarded, and traditional Christianity is left standing as a valid option, which is no small thing considering the timing of the novel's publication.

Love, religious faith, rural tradition, and ancestry are all indelibly linked in these two authors' worldviews. In *Tess*, the reader is struck by a sense of foreboding from the opening paragraphs. Tess's father latches onto the parson's grandiose account of the d'Urberville family and its supposed connection with the Durbeyfields. This sets off a disastrous chain of events in which Tess is shipped off to the estate of her family's d'Urberville "relatives" to advance her prospects. Instead, she loses her virginity, her true love, and her life, all thanks to her family's misplaced trust in an ancestral connection that may or may not be legitimate. In *Lorna Doone*, John is proud of his connection with Alfred the Great, and it is his knighthood from King James II—complete with family crest—that allows him to marry Lorna. The scene in Chapter LXIX in which John receives his crest plays out with a great deal of humor on the part of the narrator: "They did me the honour to consult me first, and to take no notice of my advice [on the design of the family crest]" (608). Still, though John has no way of proving his connection with Alfred—any more than the Durbeyfields have of proving their connection with the d'Urbervilles—no harm comes of his pride in that ancestry, whether it is a real or imagined connection. On the contrary, John's life is enhanced by his ancestry; or perhaps more precisely, his life is enhanced by other people's perceptions and assumptions about his ancestry. The opposite is true in Tess's case.

Whatever either author's intentions may have been, I believe the results of this fixation on ancestry in *Lorna Doone* and *Tess* parallel the author's attitude to Christianity. John Ridd is a Christian whose forebears allegedly had close ties to Alfred the Great; by the end of the novel,

the status of the Ridds has been raised, and John the Church-and-State man still has reason to be loyal to God and king, since both have treated him well. In *Tess*, Angel is a skeptic trying to break away from his Calvinist upbringing, and Tess is a woman condemned to feel the lash of censure from the Christians around her whose attitude to “adulterers” like herself is not at all that of Christ.²⁹ By the end of the novel, Tess is dead, Angel is still a skeptic, and Hardy has given the reader little reason to think well of Christianity or its adherents, excepting his fascination with its symbolic and ethical trappings. Christ in Hardy’s Wessex is an absent savior that his characters cry out for but never really find, at least in any sense that aligns with orthodox Church teachings. Tess receives no benefit from her ancestry or from orthodoxy; instead, they lead her to ruin. In line with the arguments of Darwinists and the more liberal thinkers in the Church, Hardy shatters his characters’ faith in God’s benevolence and the validity of Christianity, leaving them little to hold onto. For John, by contrast, ancestry and orthodoxy lead to dreams fulfilled and challenges overcome.

Lorna Doone shows John holding onto his simple faith in God, and in an era when simple faith in God could no longer be taken for granted, this evidently reassured many of the novel’s readers. One of the earliest reviews of *Lorna Doone*, published anonymously in *The Spectator* roughly four months after the novel’s first edition was released, applauds it as an antidote to the cares of modern life: “Seed-time and harvest, summer and winter succeeded each other [in John Ridd’s time] as now, but life was less rapid, its interests fewer, though they served then, as now, perhaps better then than now, to fill life’s space” (962). The reviewer contrasts the cynicism of other contemporary literary productions with the plainspoken conservatism of *Lorna Doone* and

²⁹ See the passage in John 8 in which Christ rescues a woman who is about to be executed for adultery. In verse 7, he addresses the religious authorities: “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” In verse 11, he speaks directly to the woman: “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.” This attitude is entirely different from that of Hardy’s sign painter in Chapter XII of *Tess*.

its simple cast of characters. Where these other novels exhibit “that barrenness of faith which clothes itself in reverential phrase,” the rural populace in *Lorna Doone* embraces a faith that is as unassuming as it is firm: “Doubtless to them [the people of Exmoor] He [God] was resting as a pillar of cloud or of light over their homesteads, and all traveling took them beyond Him”

(962).³⁰ Nearly thirty years later, American writer and journalist Harold Frederic would argue that *Lorna Doone* “had occasioned a significant change in the course of fiction” (Dunn 142).

This claim may seem bold in light of *Lorna Doone*’s present reputation—or lack thereof—in the scholarly community, but Frederic elaborates in a way that explains at least one major difference between *Lorna Doone* and the work of Blackmore’s fellows: “After mentioning ‘the didactic school’ as represented by Charles Kingsley, John Henry Inglesant, and George Eliot, [Frederic] remarks that ‘*Lorna Doone*, which belongs to that period, shines out in blessed exception like a planet against a steely sky of ethical purpose and transcendental mysticism” (Dunn 142; qtd. in Dunn 142). So it is clear that at least some of the novel’s readers in the late Victorian era saw it as an effective response to the confusion occasioned by the scientific and philosophical “progress” of modern life. Sutton summarizes *Lorna Doone*’s conservative appeal succinctly: “[John Ridd’s] sense of divine activity in the world is one sign of the sacramental vision shared by Hopkins and Meynell, both Roman Catholics, and the Anglican Blackmore. John can perceive ‘the grandeur of God’ in nature” (52). Where Hardy’s *Tess* looks on nature and the future with what is at best an ambiguous hope touched by doubt and the shadow of Tess’s tragic life and death, Blackmore and John Ridd look forward with a brighter hope, to the day when men and

³⁰ The imagery from Exodus is probably chosen deliberately. When the Israelites escape Egypt, God uses pillars of cloud and fire, resting over the Israelite encampment, as a sign that he wants his people to stay in that location for as long as the pillars remain in place (Exod. 40.36-37). In an era of rapid religious and social change, such an image stands for persistent trust in a power that cannot be verified by the scientific method. Moreover, a pillar “resting” over someone’s homestead suggests a stability Eliot, Hardy, Blackmore, and others saw as conspicuously lacking in much of Victorian society.

women will become Christians in earnest and God will restore the human race to life like the dying-and-rising Lorna shot at her wedding.

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4. “One Who Meddles with the Muses”: Historical Detail and Literary Allusion in *Lorna Doone*

Where chapters two and three explored Blackmore’s conservatism and the historical significance of *Lorna Doone* in relation to *Adam Bede* and *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, in this final chapter, I will take a closer look at two elements of Blackmore’s literary technique: historical detail and literary allusion. *Lorna Doone* follows a template for balancing realism with romance very similar to the template popularized by Sir Walter Scott some fifty-five years earlier with his debut novel, *Waverley*. *Lorna Doone*’s blending of these two distinct genres has appealed to many of its readers, and to see how this blending works is to grasp much of the novel’s aesthetic value. Blackmore uses literary allusion as an important device for fleshing out John’s character, but the device also exposes the roots of Blackmore’s own conservatism in classical and modern literature. John rates Shakespeare and the Bible as the two most significant sources of his intellectual development, so it is not surprising that a close examination of the text yields numerous allusions to both of these sources. Since chapters two and three covered several of the novel’s major biblical allusions, the analysis in this chapter will concentrate on the novel’s other literary allusions, including allusions to John Dryden, Shakespeare, and classical Greek and Latin works. Just as Blackmore’s religious and social beliefs show him to be a stubborn traditionalist, so Blackmore’s choice of historical details and literary allusions demonstrates his faith in a classical education and the conservative, anti-modern worldview such an education represented for him.

Scott is an obvious influence on *Lorna Doone*, and the secondary literature on Blackmore acknowledges this. Quincy Guy Burris’s 1930 dissertation separates Blackmore’s literary connections into three groups: those novelists who are “remote from Blackmore in manner and content,” those novelists who “approach [him] more nearly,” and those novelists “who approach

him *most* nearly” (5-6, emphasis added). Scott falls in the lattermost group, and several pages in the dissertation are devoted to exploring the many connections between Blackmore and Scott. Surprisingly, *Waverley* is absent from Burris’s discussion, though it is often credited as Scott’s claim to fame and began the long string of historical novels to which *Waverley* gave its name. Eagleton refers to Scott as the “father of the realist historical novel,” but Scott is not a realist in the same sense George Eliot would be a few decades later (95). Scott anchored his stories in a specific time and place, but rather than holding to mere realism, he was unafraid to exploit the conventions of romance: “Romance trades in the marvellous [sic], and realism in the mundane; so that by blending these two narrative forms into one, Scott hoped to forge a literary style true to both the revolutionary drama and the everyday experience of his age” (Eagleton 103). R.D. Blackmore would carry on this blending of narrative forms with *Lorna Doone*, as he explicitly stated in the preface to the first edition.³¹ Scott mined the best of both worlds, as did Blackmore after him. In his examination of the relationship between imagination and reality in historical fiction, Saree Makdisi asserts that *Waverley* “offered . . . an altogether new series of images and representations of the Scottish Highlands. Beginning with *Waverley*, in other words, Sir Walter Scott’s image of the Highlands has in cultural terms virtually taken over from and supplanted ‘the real thing,’ by which I mean something stronger than that Scott’s representation has excluded other views of the Highlands” (155). This is just as true of Blackmore’s representations of Exmoor: “The surge of interest in [*Lorna Doone*’s] actual topography took him somewhat aback; and in a number of letters Blackmore explains and apologises for some of the embarrassing consequences” (Knights xxxii). Tourists who visited Exmoor in person were frequently let down

³¹ “This work is called a ‘romance,’ because the incidents, characters, time, and scenery, are alike romantic. And in shaping this old tale, the Writer neither dares, nor desires, to claim for it the dignity or cumber it with the difficulty of an historic novel. And yet he thinks that the outlines are filled in more carefully, and the situations (however simple) more warmly coloured and quickened, than a reader would expect to find in what is called a ‘legend’” (3).

by the differences between the Exmoor of their imagination as fed by the novel and the Exmoor of real life. Kate Hillard, in an 1882 article for *Harper's*, writes about a shepherdess at one of the *Lorna Doone* sites who was “in a state of intense delight at our disappointment about the ruins, and discussed the situation in that soft Somersetshire accent that gives such heartiness to the language” (qtd. in Knights xxxiv).

Navigating the fine line between reality and imagination and between the past and the present is key to what *Waverley* and *Lorna Doone* accomplish, as the historical details in both novels allow the authors to present their unique perspectives on that history without falling into complete fabrication, and the conventions of romance allow them to manipulate historical details to increase the emotional appeal of the narratives and keep them from becoming too dry. Jayne Lewis's commentary on Sophia Lee's proto-Gothic historical novel *The Recess* resonates with the literary context Scott and Blackmore faced in the century following.³² In considering Lee's use of historical detail in *The Recess*, Lewis asks an intriguing question: “What did Mary Queen of Scots have to do with the rise of historical fiction in Britain? Quite a lot if we picture that fiction as heir to two of the mid-eighteenth century's seemingly opposite accomplishments—the discontinuous idiom of sensibility and the linear, coherent narratives of enlightenment historiography” (166). While “sensibility” and “romance” are not necessarily the same thing, both threads tend to be associated with the same literary tropes and techniques: emotions that are heightened if not exaggerated, flowery language, exotic settings, beautiful heroines, dastardly villains, and so on. Lewis posits that the historical figure of Mary acts as a mediator between the sentimental thread and the historical thread in *The Recess*: “Lee uses the figure of an injured queen to investigate the secretly twinned structures of historiography and sensibility. Through that figure Lee also presses the implications of their intersection for the production, and textual

³² *The Recess* was published in three volumes in the 1780s.

reproduction, not just of British history, but ultimately of modern sentimental culture itself” (168). Whether or not this is true of Lee’s novel, Lewis’s words apply to *Lorna Doone* and *Waverley* surprisingly well. Both are heirs to a particular approach in which writers sought to blend fact and fiction in a way that was not only convincing from a historical standpoint, but was also capable of moving the emotions. Because eighteenth-century readers “knew the historical Mary well,” it would not have been difficult for them to spy glaring discrepancies between the historical Mary and Lee’s portrayal of the queen in *The Recess* (Lewis 166). The same is undoubtedly true for the figures of Bonnie Prince Charlie in *Waverley* and James II and Judge Jeffreys in *Lorna Doone*. Shuttleworth notes that “tales of the ‘hanging judge,’ Judge Jeffreys . . . still survive in West Country lore” (xxii). Regardless of how many characters in *Lorna Doone* are completely invented, the presence of actual figures from history who are written into the story in such a way as to satisfy most readers who know the outlines of the person’s character is an effective—and affective—method for grounding even the most fantastic story in reality and driving home a point. As Mary Queen of Scots helped Lee find a balance between sentimental culture and historiography, so James II and Judge Jeffreys help Blackmore find a balance, not only between the opposing demands of realism and romance, but also between his conservative respect for the institution of the monarchy on the one hand and his honest disgust with that same institution’s human weaknesses on the other. John Ridd’s comments about Jeffreys are laced with sarcasm, as in the following description of the judge’s actions in the aftermath of the Battle of Sedgemoor:

The first man now in the kingdom (by virtue perhaps of energy, rather than of excellence) was the great Lord Jeffreys, appointed the head of the Equity, as well as the law of the realm, for his kindness in hanging five hundred people, without

the mere brief of trial.³³ Nine out of ten of these people were innocent, it was true; but that proved the merit of the Lord Chief Justice so much the greater for hanging them, as showing what might be expected of him, when he truly got hold of a guilty man. Now the King had seen the force of this argument; and not being without gratitude for a high-seasoned dish of cruelty, had promoted the only man in England, combining the gifts of both butcher and cook. (633, ch. LXXII)

John may be a Church-and-State man, and his unwillingness to join Monmouth's cause says a great deal about his respect for—or fear of—the offices of the king and the Lord Chief Justice. His support, however, is not so blind that he is willing to overlook crimes of such magnitude without judgment. At times, it is difficult to tell just where John stands on politics and religion. He is an Anglican, but he marries a Catholic. He is a Church-and-State man, but his remarks about the king and court are more “treasonous” than any deed committed by Lord Jeffreys's unfortunate victims. He is a yeoman who marries an heiress. In other words, John is a man of contradictions, but rather than allowing these contradictions to destroy him, he resolves them. He resolves his religious conflict by allowing James to assume he is a good Catholic, and then he marries Lorna in an Anglican wedding. He proudly calls himself a Church-and-State man, but he criticizes the king and his court from afar and stays out of politics except when he is forced to intervene on the battlefield of Sedgemoor to save Tom Faggus's life. He despises the greed he sees in London and the corruption of highborn families like the Doones, the de Whichehases, and even his own Uncle Huckaback, but he marries the last remaining member of one of the highest families in the land. Shuttleworth summarizes Blackmore's credo: “In true Victorian fashion,

³³ The 2000 A&E television adaptation of *Lorna Doone* features a scene in which rebel after rebel is brought before Judge Jeffreys to be tried. After a pause of some few seconds, each is dismissed with the words, “Guilty, death by hanging” or simply “Hanging.” Each verdict receives uproarious applause from the courtroom. Though this scene does not appear in the book, it is not out of character with Blackmore's stern portrayal of the judge (Coyle, Warner, and Gillen).

the novel celebrates the victory of the rising middle class over the old moribund order. John's marriage to Lorna grafts middle-class energy and labour on to the wealth and lineage of the aristocracy" (xiv). It is also worth repeating Blackmore's remark that he had "no faith in the Christianity of any man so narrow-minded that he will not appear on the same platform with those who differ from him in the matter of interpretation of the Scriptures (qtd. in Dunn 89). All of this shows a healthy respect for religious and social differences within certain limits, one of those limits being Blackmore's unwillingness to consider secularism and evolutionary science as valid options. Both Blackmore and John are staunch Anglicans, Church-and-State men who do not doubt the validity of the institutions they believe in, even when they question the actions of the individuals representing those institutions and the sectarian mindset embraced by those on opposing sides of the religious question. Their method of counteracting the flood of rebellion—whether we are talking of Monmouth's rebellion or the heterodoxies of the Victorian era—is productive labor and the conviction that comes from simple trust in God and the institutions of government God ordained for man's use. Blackmore lived this credo in his life as a fruit-grower and the son of an Anglican minister, and in the pages of *Lorna Doone*, John Ridd the farmer exemplified this same credo for readers in the Victorian era and continues to do so for readers in the twenty-first century.

One of the ironies of *Lorna Doone* is the learnedness of its humble protagonist, and one of the best ways to comprehend who Blackmore and John Ridd are is to examine their tastes in literature. In the authors they believe to be sublime and the authors they express distaste for, it is not very difficult to perceive the foundations of their orthodox thinking about God and human nature—and in Blackmore's case, his attitude to modern science. This, too, helps set Blackmore and his work apart from that of Eliot, Hardy, and other more "modern" thinkers of the Victorian

era. In the first paragraph of the novel, John Ridd dismisses his more intellectual side with the following: “I am nothing more than a plain unlettered man, not read in foreign languages, as a gentleman might be, nor gifted with long words (even in mine own tongue), save what I may have won from the Bible or Master William Shakespeare, whom, in the face of common opinion, I do value highly. In short, I am an ignoramus, but pretty well for a yeoman” (9). Later in the chapter, John is discussing his accomplishments at school and claims that he could “make bold with Eutropius and Caesar—by aid of an English version—and as much as six lines of Ovid” by the time he was twelve (9). He then proceeds to transcribe two Greek verbs, one that he learned in school and one that his eldest grandson has learned. The verbs are not translated, but they are rendered with Greek letters, and Peter Merchant’s translation of and commentary on these verbs suggests that John knows exactly what he is writing:

Ridd tells us that at the time of his being suddenly called away from his boarding school, Blundell’s, he was learning to conjugate *τύπτω* (“I strike”); and waiting ten pages further on in the grammar, to be learnt were Ridd able to remain, was *φιλέω* (“I love”). Defined there, in just two words, is the male adolescent’s classic progress from schoolboy rough-and-tumbles into the greater world of teenage romance. (245)

This “classic” story arc is also the story arc of our protagonist. Almost as soon as John finishes his self-introduction, we are dropped into the middle of one of his wrestling bouts at school—“I strike,” indeed. The “I love” portion of John’s journey is foreshadowed early on in his sighting of the coach carrying Lorna and her mother, though of course he does not know the identity of the “dark-haired” little girl that he spies in the front seat of the coach (25-26, ch. III). Given the appropriateness of *τύπτω* and *φιλέω* to the novel’s plot and to John’s character development, it is

almost absurd to suppose that his choice of verbs is anything other than deliberate. This means the reader is given good reason to suspect, within the first few pages of the story, that this “plain unlettered man” telling us his life story may be underrating his own intellect. Is this humility or subterfuge? Whatever his motives for playing the ignoramus, John is cleverer than he lets on in his command of language and literature.

In spite of the importance John ascribes to Shakespeare, John Dryden, the seventeenth-century poet named twice in the text and scorned both times, is almost as significant a presence as the Bard himself, because the comments that John makes about Dryden reinforce the idea that Blackmore—or John Ridd, at least—is no panegyrist for the monarchy; conservative royalism in *Lorna Doone* is balanced by respect for the personhood of the lower classes. In *Lorna Doone*, the portrait of Judge Jeffreys is unflattering, not only to the judge, but to the king who tolerates the judge. This is in stark contrast to the style of Dryden, who chronicled some of the major events that took place during the same period depicted in *Lorna Doone*. Dryden’s poetry, much of which was published shortly after the events described, has a tendency to praise the reigning king in effusive tones amplified by heavy use of classical and biblical imagery. John Ridd’s first reference to Dryden is found in Chapter L: “I cannot put it in the style of Mr. Dryden—whom to compare to Shakespeare! but if once I begin upon that, you will never hear the last of me” (417). This tells us little except that John is offended by the very notion of comparing Shakespeare with Dryden, and the phrasing suggests that “style” may have something to do with John’s distaste for the poet. This is confirmed when John makes a second, more explicitly derogatory remark about Dryden fourteen chapters later. In this scene, John is riding to the battlefield of Sedgemoor in an effort to rescue Tom Faggus, who has left his wife—John’s sister Annie—and son behind for the

purpose of joining Monmouth's ill-fated rebellion. It is nighttime, and John catches a glimpse of the northern lights in the sky overhead:

All this was done by lanthorn light, although the moon was high and bold; and in the northern heaven, flags and ribbons of a jostling pattern; such as we often have in autumn, but in July very rarely. Of these Master Dryden has spoken somewhere, in his courtly manner; but of him I think so little—because by fashion preferred to Shakespeare—that I cannot remember the passage; neither is it a credit to him. (563, ch. LXIV)

John's forgetfulness is no coincidence, nor is it a sign of the ignorance he accuses himself of in the opening chapter. The reason we can be so confident of this is that John demonstrates a remarkable acuity for remembering literary quotations in other parts of the novel. In Chapter LI, when Carver Doone's father pays a visit to the Ridds after Sir Ensor has passed away, he speaks of his feelings: "Ah, a great loss, dear Mrs. Ridd, a terrible loss to this neighbourhood! As one of our great writers says—I think it must be Milton—'We ne'er shall look upon his like again'" (427). John quickly corrects the attribution: "With your good leave, sir . . . Master Milton could never have written so sweet and simple a line as that. It is one of the great Shakespeare" (427). The Counsellor berates himself for his "neglect" and exclaims, "This must be your son, Mistress Ridd, the great John, the wrestler. And one who meddles with the Muses!" (427). This shows that John has a talent for remembering quotations when he wants to remember them. His failure to recall the passage from Dryden is not a sign of ignorance or inability; it is a sign of his disdain for the poet in question. Shuttleworth indicates that the passage John is referring to is from *The Hind and the Panther*. To understand his derision, it may help to see Dryden's "courtly manner" in this poem firsthand:

Thus, while with heav'nly charity she spoke,
 A streaming blaze the silent shadows broke,

 Such were the pleasing triumphs of the sky
 For James's late nocturnal victory,
 The pledge of his almighty patron's love,
 The fireworks which his angel made above. (649-50, 654-657)

Shuttleworth's commentary is invaluable: "On the basis of this passage [from *The Hind and the Panther*], Macaulay includes the aurora borealis in his account of [Sedgemoor]. For Dryden, the 'streaming blaze' is a symbolic revelation of divine approbation of James II" (677). In Chapter LXXII, John abuses Judge Jeffreys and suggests that James II is at fault for promoting such a "butcher" of men to high places, so it is not hard to see why John would find Dryden's assertion of divine favor over James II off-putting in this context (633, ch. LXXII).

Is this disdain for Dryden John's disdain alone, or is it Blackmore's? In the absence of direct evidence from Blackmore himself, there is enough circumstantial evidence from *Lorna Doone* and some of Dryden's primary works to suggest that Blackmore did not care for Dryden or at least that Blackmore's worldview and writing style were more egalitarian than Dryden's when it came to the dignity of the lower classes. One passage from Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis* describes the common sailors of the British Navy who are about to be involved in a battle with the Dutch:

Thousands were there in darker fame that dwell,
 Whose deeds some nobler poem shall adorn,
 And though to me unknown, they, sure, fought well

Whom Rupert led and who were British born. (701-704)

In and of itself, the stanza might seem innocuous. Dryden praises the sailors for their impending deeds of valor, and it is assumed that they “fought well.” However, it is telling that the stanza ends with a reference to Rupert and that these men are defined, not by their individualism, but by their identity as British subjects. They are not names and faces to Dryden; they are members of a collective symbolized by Rupert and by the Britain of Charles II and his kingly predecessors. This is not the only passage in *Annus Mirabilis* to demonstrate Dryden’s superficial treatment of almost anyone outside the royal court:

At length the crackling noise and dreadful blaze

Called up some waking lover to the sight,

And long it was ere he the rest could raise,

Whose heavy eyelids yet were full of night. (897-900)

As with the passage describing Rupert’s sailors, there is nothing especially remarkable about this stanza on its own. It is the cumulative effect of so many drab archetypes of the lower classes that creates a sense of distance from their humanity. From common sailors and the unidentified lover to “frighted mothers” and “helpless infants,” English citizens who do not wear a crown or bear a noble title are painted with the same small brush (903, 904).

Dryden’s language is very different and his portrait much more developed when he is speaking of the king, whether that king is Charles II or James II. Biblical and classical figures are marshaled in droves to flatter the monarch’s self-image in *Astraea Redux*. Among these are Jove, David, Adam, Moses, and Augustus (38, 79, 114, 262, 321). Critics have often scoffed at the effect produced by this parade of luminaries combined with the heightened poetic language, all in service of the monarchy. Alberto Cacicedo borrows from Samuel Johnson’s *The Lives of*

the Most Eminent English Poets to summarize the general feeling towards Dryden: “In the meanness and servility of hyperbolical adulation, I know not whether, since the days in which the Roman emperors were deified, he [Dryden] has ever been equaled” (qtd. in Cacicedo 407).³⁴

One further piece of evidence that both distinguishes Dryden from Blackmore and hints at common ground between the classicists is in their translations of Virgil. Dryden translated all of Virgil’s works in an elaborate edition that earned him what was an unprecedented amount of income from a literary work at that time (Zwicker and Bywaters 568). Blackmore took pride in his personal translation of the *Georgics*, which he considered the best of his works. Blackmore treasured the *Georgics* for its minute descriptions of nature, and the care he took in selecting just the right words or phrases to convey the force of Virgil’s original text was obsessive. Much of his translation work was done by heart without the original texts in front of him, and he boasted in a letter to a friend that “there are some happy phrases [in my translation] such as a gardener would professionally like, and the rendering is very literal” (qtd. in Dunn 113). In his comments on Conington’s translation, we see how exacting he could be: “Conington makes the good wife in Georgic III take a vine leaf to skim the pot in the depth of winter. If he had served his time in a garden he would have known that the vine is deciduous. Even without that he could scarcely have suggested a leaf less fit for the purpose, deeply indented and thin as it is” (qtd. in Dunn 113). It is this same attention to minute details from nature that prompted Hardy’s admiration of *Lorna Doone*. Dryden, in his letter to Sir Robert Howard that prefaced *Annus Mirabilis*, praised

³⁴ Some recent critics have broken away from this stereotype, seeing in Dryden a subtler poet than Johnson saw. Cacicedo argues later in his article that *Astraea Redux* “does not oscillate between the ludicrous and the sublime; rather, the poem presents a very clear-eyed image of Charles, his historical significance to England, and the political constraints within which he will be obliged to reign” (408). Scott Paul Gordon adds a similar note of dissent: “For the figure of Henry V, to which Dryden’s poem quietly and riskily alludes, invokes a young, untested monarch who, upon his sudden ascension, abandoned his debauched past and low companions to achieve glorious deeds” (203). To these two critics, it is less about what Charles is than it is about what he might become. Still, the reigning critical perception of Dryden over the course of the last few centuries appears to have been closer to that of Johnson.

Virgil's *Georgics* as "the divinest part of all his writings" due to its "many . . . excellent images of nature, most of which are neither great in themselves, nor have any natural ornament to bear them up: but the words wherewith he describes them are so excellent" (196-201).³⁵ Still, though Dryden credited Virgil as an influence on *Annus Mirabilis* and many of his other poetic works, the difference in the objects Dryden and Blackmore chose to emphasize and the ways in which their love of Virgil carried over into their original work is significant. Where Dryden chose to emphasize the royalty, Blackmore chose to emphasize the humble. Dryden's poetry praises the king in flattering analogies taken from ancient myth and the Bible, but in *Lorna Doone*, we see everything from the perspective of John Ridd the farmer. John shows respect to the king and his representatives but never forgets that they are still human beings, subject to the same temptations and imperfections as everyone else.

The comparison between Blackmore and Dryden is valuable for at least three reasons. First, it elucidates Blackmore's skills and interests as a translator of the classics, particularly of Virgil's nature poem, the *Georgics*. Secondly, John Ridd's comments about Dryden's "courtly manner" and his lack of interest in committing Dryden's poetry to heart show a more clear-eyed conservatism on Blackmore's part, one that is well aware of the faults of the monarchy and is not willing to stoop to panegyrics. Thirdly, when we take Dryden's perspective in poems like *Annus Mirabilis* and *Astraea Redux*, in which he raises the king and the court far above the rest of the citizenry, and compare it with *Lorna Doone*, Blackmore's "simple tale told simply" that views the world through the eyes of an intelligent yeoman, we begin to see Blackmore as a man whose loyalty to tradition and authority is balanced by his empathy with the lower classes. While John

³⁵ For some readers, Dryden's open admiration of Virgil's observations from nature failed to translate—literally and figuratively—into effective poetry. Wordsworth remarked that "Dryden has neither a tender heart nor a lofty sense of moral dignity . . . That his cannot be the language of imagination must have necessarily followed from this; that there is not a single image from Nature in the whole body of his works; and in his translation from Virgil, whenever Virgil can be fairly said to have his eye upon his object, Dryden always soils the passage" (208-210).

pays respect to his superiors in the social hierarchy, he expects them to treat him with dignity and fairness in return.

Blackmore was more than just a man with a classical education who happened to make occasional references to the classics in his work; it is obvious he saw the classics as a central part of his education and that of his hero, John Ridd. In *Lorna Doone*, the closest we ever get to an outright plea in favor of classical education is a statement that John's father was a "great admirer of learning" (9, ch. I). Still, John's knowledge of classical texts, his appreciation for "sweet and simple" literary axioms, and his choice to open his narrative with an account of his education are consistent with Blackmore's more explicit defense of classical education in other sources. *Lorna Doone* is as good a place as any to meet with this Victorian standard bearer for the literature of ancient Greece and Rome. It is no stretch to see the academic elements in *Lorna Doone* as a sign of Blackmore's faith in the classical education he received at Blundell's. In the first volume of *The Remarkable History of Sir Thomas Upmore*, published in 1884, Blackmore's main character makes the following ironic statement about the curriculum changes at his school: "For the few, whose parents might still be benighted enough to insist upon Greek and Latin, a Classical Master would be kept, but the College . . . would henceforth aim at a loftier mark. Science was the noble, and simple distinction, the all-absorbing element of this age" (243, ch. XV). On leaving for Oxford in the second volume, Tommy endorses the philosophy that lies behind his university experience: "We looked upon the chosen spirits of three thousand years, and more, as likelier to have left things worthy of our heed and sequence, than the half-taught men who spring up now, and by dint of smashing make a row" (18, ch. II). Tommy reserves his praise for "men who had made a life-long study of the work they dealt with, who attempted not to gloze our minds with universal smattering, but forced us to learn of some few subjects what is knowledge, and what is

not” (18). “Science” is seen as an interloper beside the classical learning of yore; to Blackmore, modern science is an endeavor that makes dangerous claims about humanity’s origins, purpose, and ethical responsibilities. The scientists who “by dint of smashing make a row” are held guilty of the smashing of institutions and practices that have existed for thousands of years. Max Keith Sutton stresses that “the times seemed determined to upset [Blackmore],” and among the “omens of doom” Blackmore saw in his lifetime were “the decline of British agriculture . . . the challenge of science to the ideal of a classical education, and the growing acceptance of Darwin’s theory of evolution” (90). The literary allusions in *Lorna Doone* emphasize values Blackmore felt were under attack in the Victorian era. The novel’s epigraph is part and parcel of this emphasis. The quotation, taken from Theocritus, is usually rendered in Greek, but in the notes to the Oxford UP edition, Shuttleworth cites Blackmore’s own English translation of the passage:

Not for me the land of Pelops, not for me a purse of gold,
 Be it to possess, nor than winds more swift to be!
 But beneath this rock to sing, and here within my arms to hold
 Thee, and watch my flock together grazing towards Scilian sea. (664)

As Shuttleworth points out, this epigraph “sets the pastoral tone for the novel” and foreshadows the choice that John and Lorna will make to live a simple life together at Plover’s Barrows rather than embracing the world of power and prestige from which Lorna’s birth family springs (664). Based on the arguments I have just made and Sutton’s summarization of Blackmore’s attitude to the Victorian era’s many cultural upheavals, I would take Shuttleworth’s statement a step further by contending that Blackmore’s embrace of pastoralism and simplicity in *Lorna Doone* is also a

rejection of the modern historical and social context in which he lived.³⁶ To Blackmore, science and technology were a threat to stability, order, and common sense. In *Lorna Doone*, John Ridd shies away from the London lifestyle and all that goes with it, infinitely preferring his farm and the simple people in his neighborhood. The only science Blackmore took a real interest in was the science of fruit-growing. Show him a new pear or a more effective technique for protecting his produce from the weather, and he would be grateful. Tell him that man evolved from lower life forms, and his response would be scorn. Blackmore and John are interested in human nature, its good points, its bad points, and all that makes us who we are. This detailed study of human nature is exactly what a classical education offered, but it was not just the thinkers of Greece and Rome who understood that nature and were able to express it in writing. As much as *Lorna Doone* is influenced by Blackmore's love of classical texts, it is also influenced by another more recent writer mentioned in the novel's opening paragraph, and that writer is Shakespeare.

How does Shakespeare's influence show itself in *Lorna Doone*? Does this influence in any way contribute to Blackmore's rejection of evolution, liberal theology, and the technological developments of the day? For a literary critic, John's immediate invocation of the Bard is an open invitation to search the text for Shakespearean allusions, and even the most cursory search does not disappoint. Setting aside direct allusions to the plays and poems, Shakespeare's name occurs in the novel six times. I have already examined four of these occurrences. Aside from John's claim that the Bible and "Master" William Shakespeare are his two greatest sources of learning, there are also the two direct comparisons of Shakespeare with Dryden and the scene in which John corrects the Counsellor on his attribution of a line from *Hamlet*. That leaves two additional occurrences. One is found in the first sentence of Chapter XLVII: "Nothing very long

³⁶ This is a return to arguments I made in chapters two and three. Like Blackmore, Eliot and Hardy lamented the passing of the rural English community, but they—and many others—were more willing to accept the theological and philosophical changes that came along with the transition from a rural society to an urban one.

abides; as the greatest of all writers (in whose extent I am for ever lost in raptured wonder, and yet for ever quite at home, as if his heart were mine, although his brains so different), in a word as Mr. William Shakespeare, in every one of his works insists, with a humoured melancholy” (382). “In every one of his works” is a phrase that makes it unnecessary to tie this passage to a specific play or poem, and in spite of its pseudo-Shakespearean ring, “nothing very long abides” fails to yield a one-on-one correspondence to any line from Shakespeare. What is especially intriguing about this passage is found a few paragraphs later, when John recounts his first real exposure to Shakespeare. We learn that during John’s trip to London, a book lands on his head as he is walking along the street. The book, it turns out, was thrown from an upstairs window by a woman who was trying to hit her neighbor across the road. The book hits John instead, and he decides to hold onto it. The book happens to be a collection of the works of Shakespeare, and as John walks away from the incident, he finds himself studying the book with rapt attention:

Now this book, so acquired, has been not only the joy of my younger days, and main delight of my manhood, but also the comfort, and even the hope, of my now declining years. In a word, it is next to my Bible to me, and written in equal English; and if you espy any goodness whatever in my own loose style of writing, you must not thank me, John Ridd, for it, but the writer who holds the champion’s belt in wit, as I once did in wrestling. (383, ch. XLVII)

What is important about this brief passage is its role in John’s overall picture of Shakespeare and his declaration of Shakespeare’s influence on his life. The origin story of John’s encounter with Shakespeare’s work is much more than an amusing anecdote. John is crediting Shakespeare with anything of value in his own narrative style. The preamble to the London anecdote—“As if his heart were mine, although his brains so different”—intimates a fundamental connection between

John and Shakespeare that transcends any differences in personality or situation. I believe that fundamental connection is human nature. Few have articulated Shakespeare's achievement more succinctly than Johnson in his "Preface to *The Plays of William Shakespeare*": "Shakespeare is, above all writers . . . the poet of nature, the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life" (Johnson 301). In Chapter L of *Lorna Doone*, immediately after dismissing Dryden but before returning to the narrative, John pauses a little to admire the very trait Johnson sees in Shakespeare:

The more a man can fling his arms (so to say) round Nature's neck, the more he can upon her bosom, like an infant, lie and suck,—the more that man shall earn the trust and love of all his fellow men.

In this matter is no jealousy (when the man is dead); because thereafter all others know how much of the milk he had; and he can suck no longer; and they value him accordingly, for the nourishment he is to them. (417)

Johnson's admiration is based on his conviction that Shakespeare's grasp of human nature is superior to that of all other writers: "It will not easily be imagined how much Shakespeare excels in accommodating his sentiments to real life but by comparing him with other authors" (Johnson 301). In *Lorna Doone*, John does exactly that by putting Shakespeare up against Dryden and Milton; he treats Dryden with curt contempt, and he is astonished by the Counsellor's mistaken belief that Milton could have written a line as sweet and simple as "We ne'er shall look upon his like again" (427, ch. LI).³⁷ Shakespeare's language, though difficult in places, is not just a good source for the long words John supposedly lacks; it is also the source of profound truths about humanity. It is not critical to establish the intrinsic value of Shakespeare's work, since there are

³⁷ While John corrects the attribution, he does not go so far as to correct the actual wording. The line is from *Hamlet*: "He was a man, take him for all in all, / I shall not look upon his like again" (1.2.187-188).

centuries of literary criticism on that subject. What is more critical is an understanding of one prominent view of Shakespeare as expressed by Johnson and how Blackmore reinforces that view through John's recurring appreciation for Shakespeare's wit. For Blackmore, Shakespeare represented the simplicity and purity of thought that—in his view—were rapidly disappearing in nineteenth-century England's milieu of change and heterodoxy. Charles Laporte's 2007 article "The Bard, the Bible, and the Victorian Shakespeare Question" never mentions *Lorna Doone* by name, but what it does provide is a wealth of historical information that richly illuminates the context in which Blackmore wrote *Lorna Doone*. Laporte explains that "the nineteenth-century idea of Shakespeare's inspiration was rarely divorced from religious and reverential connotations" (609). At almost the same time that doubts about the authorship of Shakespeare's plays began to spread, books such as David Friedrich Strauss's *The Life of Jesus*, translated from the German in 1846, gave many reason to doubt the authenticity of the Jesus depicted in the canonical Gospels (Laporte 610). For more conservative Victorians, doubting Shakespeare was tantamount to doubting Christ: "Paradoxically, the quasi-religious canonization of Shakespeare . . . could only occur when the Bible was at the center of a hermeneutic and religious crisis, and when the scriptures were being broadly reconceived . . . as a human catalogue of poetic intimations about the nature of the divine" (Laporte 613). We need only refer to John's passing comment that his personal collection of Shakespeare's work "is next to my Bible to me, and written in equal English" to know where Blackmore's protagonist, if not the author himself, falls in this debate (383, ch. XLVII).

The final occurrence of Shakespeare's name in *Lorna Doone* that I have yet to mention is also from Chapter L: "Now here I am upon Shakespeare (who died, of his own fruition, at the age of fifty-two, yet lived more than fifty thousand men, within his little span of life), when all

the while I ought to be riding as hard I can to Dulverton” (417). This sentence is remarkable mainly for John’s casual assumption that Shakespeare was a real person who died at the age of fifty-two. As Laporte overwhelmingly proves, this was not a universally-accepted premise in Blackmore’s day, though a reader could conceivably argue that this assumption is John’s, not necessarily Blackmore’s, and therefore less absurd for the seventeenth-century farmer than it would be for the nineteenth-century author of *Lorna Doone*, given the respective proximity of each to the historical period in question.³⁸

As much as Blackmore’s use of Shakespeare’s name and his more general references to Shakespeare’s work help place the novel in a Victorian literary context, no understanding of the Bard’s influence on the novel is complete without an analysis of some of the allusions, direct or indirect, to specific plays. The *Hamlet* reference in Chapter LI is worth returning to once again for its ironic parallel with the basic plot of *Lorna Doone*: “Given the murder of John’s father by the Doones, the quotation is peculiarly apt, suggesting levels of meaning clearly not intended by the Counsellor” (Shuttleworth 675). The Counsellor borrows Hamlet’s tribute to his slain father as a poetic elegy on the passing of Sir Ensor Doone, the Counsellor’s own father. Unfortunately for the Counsellor, just as he mistakes the author of the sentiment and mangles its wording, so he fails to appreciate the larger context of the scene in which it is uttered. Hamlet’s father has been slain by the treachery of his brother, and since we know John recognizes the source of the quote, it is not unreasonable to assume that he also recognizes his kinship with Hamlet, since his father was slain by the treachery of the Doones, and it was his frequent desire as a boy to take revenge

³⁸ In her account of her visit to Blackmore’s home, Elizabeth Morse related that Blackmore gave little credence to the claim that Francis Bacon had written the plays attributed to Shakespeare. However, he did admit that “the belief was growing with him that the plays were not all written by one person but were an amalgamation of the best minds of the time” (Dunn 199). It is difficult to know when Blackmore first began to accept this hypothesis, but we do know Blackmore rated Shakespeare as “the supreme poet” and referred to him as “he” (165). While this may have been a syntactic convenience, Blackmore’s doubts about Shakespeare’s identity are too tentative to prove that he ultimately committed “apostasy” from the traditional image of a single author.

on his father's killer. That the Counsellor misquotes this line is significant, because it points to his shallow grasp of Shakespeare and leads us to another issue that frequently plagued Victorian Shakespeare aficionados. Suzy Anger elaborates:

The first societies of the Victorian period were devoted to older literature: the study of Shakespeare and Chaucer as well as of old English texts. In these cases, the issues that had been of concern in the study of the classics and in much biblical criticism—problems of textual corruptions, establishing accurate manuscripts, translation questions, philological investigation into the changing meaning of words—were still important. (29-30)

By allowing the Counsellor to misquote *Hamlet* in such a way, was Blackmore making a subtle allusion to the problems of “textual corruption” and “establishing accurate manuscripts” that Anger describes in her summary of the Victorian literary scene? We may never know, but even if the allusion is unwitting, it is there nonetheless in the verbal corruption of Shakespeare's text, a sign that parallels other corruptions of the texts of Shakespeare's plays before and since Blackmore's time. This scene could also be read as a warning against the superficial study and the incautious quotation of literature. Knowing that Blackmore managed to translate Virgil's *Georgics* with minimal reference to the text, we may safely take the Counsellor as a negative example inspiring us to the heights of effective literary memorization and quotation as achieved by Blackmore.

I have not yet alluded to what is arguably the most obvious correlation between *Lorna Doone* and a specific Shakespearean play. The longstanding grudge between the Ridds and the Doones bears an undeniable resemblance to the feud between the Montagues and the Capulets in *Romeo and Juliet*. Instead of fair Verona, we are given fair Exmoor, and Blackmore's story has

a very different outcome in spite of the melodramatic near-death scene at John's wedding. Still, the echoes to Shakespeare's story of woe are present. Even before John's father is killed, there is conflict between the Ridds and the Doones thanks to the Doones' frequent pillaging. When John Ridd senior is slain by Carver, the community's general fear of the Doones becomes personal hatred for John and his family. The hatred is somewhat one-sided, because the Doones are not motivated by any special feeling of malice towards the Ridd family in their killing of the Ridd patriarch early in the narrative. That being said, when John initially meets Lorna and believes her to be a blood relative of the man who killed his father, there is a barrier that exists in the path of the lovers that is clearly caused by the division between their families. While John is quick to protest that he believes Lorna to be innocent of the crimes of her family, his love is not a love that can exist in the open without great pain to his own family. Paul Kottman asserts, "The most common interpretation of the myth [*Romeo and Juliet*] is that it exposes a conflict between the lovers' individual desires and the reigning demands of family, civic, and social norms in relation to which those desires are formed" (1). In this case, John and Lorna are at the mercy of the conflict between their families, and later, the "civic and social norms" come into play when it is discovered that Lorna belongs to a far higher station than John. Kottman continues: "We see our loves, aims, and desires as dialectically conditioned by, but never fully reconciled to, whatever our households, workplaces, and communal bonds demand of us. *Romeo and Juliet* raises this dialectical tension between individual subjects and social 'reality' to a fever pitch—unto death" (3). *Lorna Doone* reaches this "fever pitch" by making it appear as if the heroine has been killed by the villain's bullet on the cusp of her union with John, but the pitch is suddenly lowered in the final chapter to allow for a positive resolution, unlike Shakespeare's original play.

Herein lies another insight into what separates Blackmore from darker Victorian writers like Hardy: *Lorna Doone* is hopeful, and it is bold in that hopefulness. The template of *Romeo and Juliet* remains largely intact until the ending. Tragedy becomes comedy. Death becomes life at the very moment when a reader with no prior knowledge of the novel or of Blackmore is tempted to assume that Lorna is dead and will remain so. In altering the ending of the Romeo and Juliet myth in such a way, Blackmore puts himself in a category that has largely vanished from literature except in the realm of children's and fantasy literature: "Promising disaster . . . [Blackmore's] stories moves from ominous beginnings and acts of violence toward providential ends—the 'eu-catastrophe' or good turn of fortune that J.R.R. Tolkien admired in fairy tales and brilliantly created at the climax of *The Lord of the Rings*" (Sutton 38).³⁹ The "eucatastrophe" or "good turn of fortune" is a frequent theme in discussions of fantasy literature, and it is relevant here, not just because of Sutton's explicit connection between Blackmore's work and Tolkien's, but because the Christian hope that underlies the concept is central to Blackmore's faith and his literary technique in *Lorna Doone*. Susan Johnston argues that the structure of such stories is "an essentially Christian structure . . . which takes the narrative of Christ's Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection as explicitly a structure of hope" (68). In my explication of the final chapters of *Lorna Doone*, I identified both Lorna Doone and Ruth Huckaback as Christ figures who play different Christ-like roles in the story's climax.⁴⁰ The novel ends with an epilogue summarizing what happens to most of the characters, major and minor. *Lorna Doone* embraces the Christian imagery and Christian story structure as defined by Sutton, Tolkien, Johnston, and others, but this kind of structure is decidedly unfashionable in the twenty-first century, at least in certain

³⁹ Tolkien, in his essay "On Fairy-Stories," defines the eucatastrophe as a "sudden joyous turn" just before the end of the story, a turn from impending doom to victory, life, and hope: "it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is *evangelium* [The "Gospel" or the coming of the Kingdom of God], giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief" (85-86).

⁴⁰ See chapter three, p. 57-59.

quarters: “The Dickensian epilogue has . . . all but disappeared from the post-Victorian novel, exiled to the less serious genres of children’s and fantasy literature in the company of its equally naive cousin, the happy ending” (Johnston 67).⁴¹ Peter Merchant relegates *Lorna Doone* to the status of a boy’s classic, and Sally Shuttleworth labels it a classic of adolescent female reading, so the precedent for categorizing *Lorna Doone* with children’s literature already exists in the scholarship on Blackmore’s work, even if the eucatastrophic structure of his novels—his most famous novel, in particular—has never been identified as a reason for its association with what Johnston calls “less serious genres.” Whether or not this association is just, and whether or not this should preclude scholars from taking *Lorna Doone* seriously as an example of conservative Victorian literature—I hope I have successfully argued that the novel deserves greater scholarly attention on several levels—it is enough to remark that *Lorna Doone*’s twist on the Romeo and Juliet ending is an essentially Christian twist.

In the four chapters of this study, I have covered a variety of literary and philosophical issues, and it is now necessary to unite them. Much might be said of *Lorna Doone* in relation to other texts from Victorian and pre-Victorian times. I have chosen Eliot, Hardy, Scott, Dryden, and Shakespeare because of their particular relevance to *Lorna Doone*’s plot and themes and the strong contrast that they allow me to draw between Blackmore’s views and the views of his more critically acclaimed peers. Blackmore’s life shows him to be conservative in almost every sense of the word, and *Lorna Doone* is grounded in that conservatism. John Ridd is a classically educated yeoman who values the Bible and Shakespeare above all other literary works. God and the poet of nature, in other words, form the two pillars of John’s existence. To John, the Bible is

⁴¹ Mike Cadden contends that the epilogue “is an awkward convention and has been out of literary fashion for a while,” except in children’s literature (343). It is a device “meant to reassure the child reader that a character gets to enjoy the positive outcomes of the story closure already attained, at least for a very long time. It isn’t enough that we provide happy endings for children, these writers imply; we need to reassure them that happiness ‘sticks’” (344).

far more than a work of literature. His trust in God is symbolized in and challenged through his romance with Lorna, but however much he doubts Lorna's fidelity at first or assumes she is dead from the bullet of her would-be murderer, he leaves his readers in no doubt that his trust in God is as firm as ever by the end of the novel. Intellectual debate in Victorian England offered plenty of bullets to the faith of believers in Christian orthodoxy, and advancing technology signaled the inevitable dwindling of rural communities like that in which John Ridd flourished. This did not stop Blackmore from holding to his convictions, which makes him an anomaly next to Eliot and Hardy. Blackmore was a man of uncommon faith in a time when faith was being attacked from all quarters, including the literary world. Losing sight of such a work as *Lorna Doone* may mean losing sight of an even more important truth that *Lorna Doone* represents. Literary and historical periods are never as simple as they may appear to be in hindsight. Eliot and Hardy are powerful voices that argue in favor of assenting to a twofold evolution, meaning evolution in the scientific sense and the evolution of traditional institutions and beliefs, especially those of the Church. In hindsight, *Lorna Doone*, John Ridd's "simple tale told simply," turns out to be quite the opposite. It is a document with rich historical and cultural resonance. It is ostensibly a tale of seventeenth-century Exmoor, but it was published at a time when the philosophical and spiritual assumptions of its protagonist and its author were on the decline in society at large. It is a tribute to a way of thinking, a way of learning, a way of loving, and a way of life fewer and fewer educated persons embraced without some level of compromise. While it is unlikely that even the most progressive critic would argue against the premise that religious and sociological conservatism lingered long after Victorian England had entered the age of Darwin and Hardy, what may prove surprising is the popularity that *Lorna Doone* enjoyed with so many readers in the midst of faith-shattering controversy in the world at large and what this says about the reading public's taste for romance,

religion, and reassurance—three keys that explain much of the novel’s appeal. That being said, there is evidence *Lorna Doone* has sometimes found favor even with those who do not share Blackmore’s conservative ideology, Hardy being the most prominent example. In 1904, fellow English novelist Eden Philpotts, an open admirer of Blackmore, gave a eulogy at the dedication of a Blackmore memorial: “Agnostic and rationalistic, Philpotts based his guarded optimism on evolution, not on faith in divine providence. His novels sometimes end as starkly as Hardy’s, and they depart from the niceties of Victorian romance. Yet he could admire both older writers and find, as a realist, what he wanted from English fiction in Blackmore—‘a true picture of our national life and character’” (Sutton 132). That picture may be out of date in some respects, but Sutton concludes his book on Blackmore with the declaration that this is no reason to allow Blackmore to fade into obscurity: “What matters . . . is not the gilded Victorian frame but the life within the picture. If time has erased or painted over the world that Blackmore remembered, the changes make his vision all the more worth preserving” (133). *Lorna Doone* is a novel that enriches our view of Victorian England, of what Victorians believed and how they responded to attacks on those beliefs. To read it alongside the works of Eliot, Hardy, and other liberals is to deepen our appreciation of the full range of human capacity for belief and doubt in a turbulent age.

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